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CHLOE ARGUELLE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE REBECCA RIOTER."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



TINSLEY BROTHERS,
CATHERINE STREET, STRAND,
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CHLOE ARGUELLE.

CHAPTER I.

AN EXHIBITION OF HUMBUGS.

Gaby Cosmopole.

AT HOME.

Foreign Office.

Saturday, June 3d.

MANY hundreds of copies of these words distributed throughout London, have the effect of collecting a brilliant assemblage of gentlemen, ladies, domestics, horses, and carriages in Downing Street on the Saturday mentioned. There is also a large and not brilliant

gathering of policemen, linkmen, pick-pockets, roughs, etc., whose presence in that locality is due to the same attractive announcement. The floors of the corridors and anterooms, and the broad, shallow steps all covered with red cloth; the gorgeously dressed, well trained servants of both sexes waiting to take charge of the endless hats, caps, cloaks, burnouses, hoods, shawls, mufflers, greatcoats, etc., which have to be duly ticketed and deposited in security; the magnificent flowers displayed profusely in all directions; the first-rate band discoursing sweet music beneath the staircase; the noble host, with the blandest of smiles, stationed at the foot of the great stairs awaiting the arrival of royalty, and shaking hands affably with all comers; the noble hostess upstairs receiving her guests with graceful dignity at the entrance to the

splendid suite of drawing-rooms; all these things prove that one of those great festivals of humbug, wherein society much delights, and which it denominates parties, is now taking place.

Why humbug should be an essential and indispensable element of society is best known to society's own self—that it is such element is an indisputable fact. For society upholds it in every possible way, clings to it, cherishes it, defends it, and excommunicates whoever dares to attack it. Should humbug be done away with, society believes it would itself inevitably share the same fate; under these circumstances it naturally follows that any large social gathering (such as a party at the Foreign Office) must be a very hot-bed and saturnalia of humbug.

Look at the handsome Lord Patrick Fitzshannon talking with an air of utmost devo-

tion to the rich widow, Mrs Foldes. To see the tender expression with which he gazes into her face, and to hear him blarneying her to the full extent of his very considerable powers in that line, the uninitiated spectator would pronounce him genuinely head over ears in love with her, and never suspect the fact that he cares not one straw about herself, but covets only her broad acres and comfortable dowry. With as much heart as he possesses he loves a pretty young lady in Dublin, to whom he was engaged for more than a year; but as his *fiancée*, though pretty and charming, had neither money nor interest wherewith to advance his fortunes, and as he is impecunious and far too indolent to do any kind of work, therefore, after mature deliberation, he has come to the conclusion that "it will never do," and has broken off the engagement

and begun seriously to devote himself to Mrs Foldes.

It was not without a pang that he cut himself adrift from his true love, and he thinks that fate is very unkind to him. But what else could he do? For it was obviously out of the question that he should destroy his prospects by marrying a portionless woman who could do nothing to help on her husband. And whenever he thinks of the poor girl in Dublin, grieving and wondering (as he well knows) at the way he has treated her, he satisfies his conscience by reflecting that if she suffers, so does he also, and that the more unpleasant it is to him to act as he has done, the less cause there is for her to complain. The pain he himself feels seems to him to excuse his conduct; and he quite hugs the thought of how much he loves her and how sorry

he is to have to give her up—which makes him fancy that matters are no worse for her than for him, and that his grievance is as great as hers.

And somehow it never strikes him that there are two things which make a wide difference in their cases. Firstly, that the cruel separation is wholly his doing, and is thrust upon her whether she likes it or not; and secondly, that there is for her no compensating rich widow as there is for him. Is not Lord Patrick a humbug—trying to humbug both himself and Mrs Foldes?

Turn from him to the grave, sensible-looking, John Scriven, talking cleverly and well about the malt tax to the Duke of Clanthistle. The duke has published a book upon the subject, and John is showing an intimate and admiring acquaintance with that book, and is contriving to insinuate himself

into the duke's good graces by most delicately expressed flattery, and by carefully agreeing with all the duke's opinions, which opinions John insiduously manages to clothe in words better than his grace can do for himself. The listener who overhears what John is saying, feels convinced that whatever other people may do, that man at all events has an unlimited belief in the Duke of Clanthistle, and reveres and looks up to him as one of the profoundest of thinkers, and most trustworthy of politicians.

Yet all this respect and admiration are only assumed. John's sole object is to be invited to Thistleton Castle, where he wants to get admittance in order more conveniently to rummage out a few local details and particulars which he requires, in order to complete an article which he is now writing (under a false name) for the *Weekly*

Dirty Clothes Bag. The article is to be an extremely stinging and personal one, wherein the duke, his family, his ancestors, his household arrangements, his book upon the malt tax, his dabblings in the regions of politics and philosophy, and, in short, everything belonging to him will be slandered, laughed at, flouted, and held up to scorn in such a manner as to give very great satisfaction to the amiable and intellectual readers of the *Weekly Dirty Clothes Bag*. It is a paper wherein the public much delight; they read it diligently, quote from it, buy it at shops and railway stations, and take care to encourage it in every way, and to make it pay well, so as to ensure a continuance of the spicy articles with which it furnishes them. Yet any one who was known to be on its staff would hardly be admitted to very confi-

dential terms in any one's house, nor be allowed opportunities of finding out many interesting little ins and outs of family history, which can be turned to good account in print; therefore Mr Scriven's connection with the paper is a secret between himself and the editor. Is not John Scriven also a humbug?

As for that foreign ambassador with ribbons and jewelled stars, who is smirking and grinning, and making himself agreeable to right and left—well—he is a diplomatist, and diplomacy is but another name for humbug. So it is only natural that he and his suite (who act according to his instructions) should be taking the greatest pains to make themselves popular, and so inculcate the belief that if there is one country in the world which their master especially loves and stands in wholesome awe of, and could

never dream of offending, that country is England; whereas all the time they know quite well that he hates her, that he has a pet scheme for conquering her, and killing or exiling all the English, that he is silyly making every preparation to bring about this desirable consummation, and that he reckons confidently on being able to accomplish it within another twelve-months. To expect truth or honesty from diplomatists would indeed be ridiculous!

Look next at the Countess of Bolyn and her daughter Lady Elise. The countess has bestowed time and thought upon the education of her family, and has backed up her precepts with example—which is no doubt the most effective teaching of any. And the consequence of the careful bringing up which Lady Elise has had is that she quite understands how foolish it is to allow herself to

be put out of the way for, or troubled about any one from whom no return is to be hoped. She knows that people are not to be valued for what they *are*, but only for what they have it in their power to *give*; that no sentiments or principles are to be judged according to any inherent merit or demerit of their own, but only according to how far they are honoured with the approval of those people with whom it is desirable to stand well; that no joke is amusing, nor *bon mot* worth repeating, unless uttered by lips that are to be propitiated. She knows, too, that though marriage is her inevitable destiny, yet that no man can be regarded as a possible husband unless he has riches or high rank to bestow upon his wife; but that if he is provided with these, then what he himself may be is a matter of no moment. And so Lady Elise,

whose young and plastic mind has been insensibly moulded and formed by the lessons of her mother, is terribly ashamed of an incipient partiality she feels for a certain good-looking and gentlemanly but otherwise undistinguished Captain Norman, and resolves to do all in her power to forget about him, to secure as a husband some one out of the "eligibles" of society, and to allow her personal inclinations to have no influence at all in matrimonial matters. Are not the countess and her daughter among the ranks of the humbugs?

There go the Osnaburgh Joneses—father, mother, and daughter. Never before have they been asked to a party at the Foreign Office, though they have long and earnestly desired such an invitation. Now that they have at length attained this great happiness, they are wandering about in the loneliness

of not knowing a soul in the great crowd around them, and are looking enviously at those fortunate individuals who have many friends and acquaintances there.

The Osnaburgh Joneses feel in their inmost hearts that they are altogether outsiders amongst the fashionable throng with which they are mingling ; but on no account would they put that feeling into words, and they talk briskly to one another and try to keep up the delusion that they are enjoying themselves, and do not in the least regret a choice party at Richmond for to-night, which they have foregone in order to be here. The Richmond party was to be composed exclusively of people in their own set and would have been thoroughly enjoyable to them ; but it was refused because, "You see, unluckily, there's one of the Foreign Office drums that night, and we really must put in an appearance at it, because

Lady Cosmopole doesn't like having her parties deserted, and there's no use in hurting people's feelings needlessly, you know!"

And so here are the Joneses—outwardly lively but inwardly dreary—employed in noting and storing up in their memories as much as possible of what they see and hear, so as to be able to talk freely about it all in their own circle, where they will henceforth swagger in their conversation until they shall impress the uninitiated with the belief that Foreign Office drums, and similar aristocratic and fashionable assemblages are their proper and most familiar atmosphere, and have always been so. Both their present affectation of enjoyment, and the prospective use that they intend to make of it are humbug—every atom. But then of course they will follow faithfully wherever the Countess of Bolyn and such like shall lead; and it is not likely

for the Osnaburgh Joneses of society to presume to do without humbug so long as the classes above them continue to find it indispensable.

A little way off stands little Mrs Shilton in animated conversation with Lord Stauber, Vice-President of the Council, and therefore head of the Education Department. Mrs Shilton is an enthusiastic supporter of the rights of women, for which she does not really care a bit, having merely taken up with the shrieking sisterhood as the readiest means of forcing herself into notice. Having joined that sisterhood the next consideration was to find some new subject to shriek about in order to enable her to take the wind out of the sails of her sisters if possible. And then there came to her the grand inspiration that the vocation of most women is to be blacksmiths if only they could get as fair

a chance of learning the trade as men have, and if no tyrannical prejudices were allowed to shut them out from that field of labour.

Unluckily, however, the blacksmiths are a most prejudiced race and set their faces steadily against employing female apprentices ; so she is convinced that Government ought to take it up, and is now inflicting on Lord Stauber a long harangue upon the immense importance of including instruction in smith's work and farriery in all educational books used at board schools from Standard II. upwards. The harangue bores Lord Stauber intensely, and he has not the remotest intention of ever making an alteration in anything unless it should be clamoured for by so large a majority as he could not refuse without endangering his place. But it would never do to let that be known, and he must not offend Mrs Shilton for fear of losing her hus-

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band's vote in Parliament ; so he listens to her rubbish gravely, affecting to be convinced by her arguments, and drawing her on and fooling her to the top of her bent, whilst all the time he is thinking how silly she is and what a fearful nuisance, and how he will make a good story out of it all and amuse his friends capitally by-and-by at her expense. They are utter humbugs the pair of them ! She, full of pretended enthusiasm for what she does not care about one scrap ; and he, falsely acquiescing and seeming to agree with her, for a selfish and ill-natured purpose ! No morsel of truth or honesty is there between them.

And so the crowd of well-dressed humbugs surges here and there through the sumptuously furnished rooms ; now pausing to talk, sit down, or refresh itself with ices, fruit, coffee, etc., and now again resum-

ing its scented, grinning, jabbering, rustling course.

About half-way up the great staircase it branches off to right and left ; the latter part leads to the corridor where Lady Cosmopole is standing, and both it and the branch to the right lead to the broad gallery running round the whole of the top of the staircase, which gallery commands an excellent view of new arrivals, and is full of guests sitting and standing about in the comparatively cool air. Amongst these in Lady Jane Dorville, lounging against the balustrade in an easy attitude and talking to Walter Mixon,—also called “ Studs,”—a young man who delights in shirt collars of such surprising tightness and stiffness as to make it a matter of difficulty to him to turn his head round, and who curtails as far as possible the syllables and letters of every word that he drops down upon his

hearers from over the edge of these wonderful collars.

Lady Jane has blunt, straightforward, masculine manners, which lead many people to think that she is as open as the day; but in truth she is a humbug like unto the rest, only that her humbugging is carried on after a peculiar fashion of her own, which makes it less patent than that of many others. Her assumed manliness is merely put on, and very far from being her real self. She had from childhood greatly desired to excel in some way or other, without caring much what the way might be; but she knew herself to be neither beautiful, accomplished, nor clever enough to have a chance of distinction against other competitors in either of those lines, and was therefore puzzled as to how she could gratify her ambition, until it at last occurred to her that she might go

in for being more independent and masculine than any other woman, and never allow herself to be outdone in that direction.

Accordingly she took to wear her hair short, to smoke, hunt, shoot, swear, bet, and generally comport herself in as manly a manner as it is possible for a lady to do, and by that means captivated the affections of Sir Henry Dorville, who, however, found much difficulty in screwing up his courage to proposing point. Seeing this bashfulness on his part, she took the matter into her own hands on the first favourable opportunity—proposed, was accepted, and married him.

She has no intention of giving up the *rôle* which she has thus far found successful, and wherein she has yet met no one to outstrip her; but it is not at all really congenial to her, and to keep it up often costs her a good deal. In some remote recess of her

breast she has a conscience which has never been altogether silenced, and which has no toleration for the bad language which she thinks it necessary to utter. She would like to give it up; only then as none of the other masculine ladies swear at all, it does give her such a marked superiority in the line she has chosen, that she cannot make up her mind to discontinue the practice and so reduce herself to their level. Yet her swearing causes her serious uneasiness. She cannot help believing it to be wicked—how wicked she does not exactly know—and she is decidedly afraid of being actually wicked, and sometimes gets sorely disquieted about it.

It would tend greatly to her peace of mind if she were either a good deal bolder, or else not bold enough to do it at all. She tries to pacify her conscience by making her language as mild as is compatible with it being bad

language in reality, and trusts devoutly that no rival may ever take to the same line, and thereby drive her to make her language stronger and stronger in order to avoid being beaten in her own especial part. Her smoking also has been a source of much discomfort to her, for the acquirement of that art caused her agonies of qualmishness, and she has more than once been forced to leave a smoking-room abruptly and retire for a space into private life; then, too, a deal of tiresome care used to be necessary to ensure that no one detected her in puffing smoke outwards instead of drawing it inwards—by which trick she used to contrive to burn away a good part of her tobacco without taking the smoke internally. She is pretty well accustomed to tobacco by this time, and does not suffer from it as of old. Yet even now she sometimes finds that being in a carriage

full of smokers with every window shut, or some equally powerful experience of nicotine, is a stronger ordeal than is at all pleasant, and will entail upon her a subsequent headache, the real cause of which she would sooner die than avow.

Again, the shooting and hunting which she professes to delight in are not really much to her taste, for she detests rough walking and getting wet, and dogs that smell doggy (as sporting dogs always do), and she is never really happy on a troublesome horse, and is not fond of big jumps.

But it would be quite out of her line to let this be suspected, so she pretends to adore all these things, and to be quite superior to the fancies, terrors, and nerves of ordinary women. And in truth she conceals her real self so successfully, and plays the part she has chosen with such vigour, that it is no easy

matter to discover that she is only acting, and is, like most people and things in society, a mere humbug.

"By Jove, but that's a pretty girl coming upstairs!" exclaims Lady Jane from her post of observation in the gallery. "Haven't seen her before. I wonder who the dickens she is? Do you know, Studs?"

"Course I do," returns Studs lazily. "Fact she's c'nection of mine, Chloe Arguelle; that's her married sister, who's bringing her out, by her side; and that's th' sister's husband following b'hind—like sheep going to slaughter, as is th' way 'f most husbands, whose woman-kind bring them to this sort 'f thing."

"Humph," replies Lady Jane. "Don't know so much about that. That chap looks to me a deuced sight more like a cock that's never had his comb cut. It's Sir Cadwallader Gough—of course, I know him and his wife :

so that girl is Lady Gough's sister, is she? I don't know the Goughs very well. What did he do before he married? Army? navy? anything in that way?"

"No—never came out 'f Wales in his life till th' eldest Arguelle married him; she put him int' Parl'ment and made him take house 'n Eaton Square. As papa and mamma Arguelle died long 'go, Lady Gough's bringing out Chloe this year. Pretty, ain't she? Only pr'sented last draw'n-room. Must go and talk t' them—by-bye."

So saying Walter Mixon, whose nickname of Studs was bestowed upon him at Eton, and has clung to him ever since on account of the gorgeous quality and lavish variety of his shirt fastenings, sauntered away from Lady Jane, and joined the Goughs soon after they had made their way into the first drawing-room.

“So you’ve come at last,” he remarks by way of greeting; “been on th’ look out for you all night.” This statement was quite untrue, but he thought it sounded civil. “Thought you’re never going t’ come; what’s kept you?”

“Oh, it was all the fault of the stupid people we had dining with us to-night!” said Lady Gough. “I did think they never would go away. When people go out to dinner, they really ought to have the sense to get away sharp afterwards, especially on a Saturday night! They’ve had their food, and one’s had quite enough of their conversation, and they ought to depart in time to let their hosts go out if they want to. Unluckily, a couple coming to dine with us this evening failed just at the last minute, when it was too late to get anyone nice to fill their places, and so we

asked those tiresome Boobles. I never saw such people to dawdle about going! When we did get off at last, we only dropped in for two minutes at the Clanthistles. I saw the duke here just now by-the-bye, and then we came straight here."

"I tell Alice," said Chloe, laughing, "that she ought to have 'carriages ordered at quarter past ten,' or something of that sort, printed on her dinner invitation cards; people *couldn't* be so obtuse as not to perceive that hint! We did our best to help the dull wits of our friends to-night, but you see we didn't produce very much effect. I had a presentiment that the Boobles were the sort of folk there's no getting rid of, and I tried hard to impress upon Mrs Boobles' mind how difficult it is to get away from dinner in time to do all one's parties on a Saturday—but she didn't see it a bit! There they stuck, and

Mr Boobles was just making a fresh start to explain to Cadwallader the real causes of the English revolution, when Alice was seized with a sudden forgetfulness as to whether our carriage had been ordered to-night or not, and was obliged to interrupt the deeply interesting conversation to find out about it from Cadwallader. Even Mr Boobles managed to see that hint, and so they took themselves off at last, else we should never have got here at all."

"Poor thing!" said Walter "S'pose you come and get 'n ice, Chloe. Must require it after s' much ag'tation."

"Well, I really think I do," answered Chloe, putting her hand into his arm. "Where shall I find you afterwards?" added she, turning to her sister.

"Oh, somewhere close about here, or else in the next room," replied Lady Gough. "I

see those odious Osnaburgh Joneses in there, and I really must do the civil to them, because he has such a lot of influence near us at Cwm Eithin, and it would never do if he were to support any other candidate against Cadwallader. I shall just work my way to them by degrees and then stop and talk to them a bit, which 'll be sure to please them uncommonly, for I can see they are looking forlorn and dismal to a degree, and don't know a soul here. Horrid creatures—how I do detest them !”

So the Goughs proceed in one direction to pay humbugging attentions to the Osnaburgh Joneses, whilst Chloe and Studs go off in another towards the refreshment place.

There are plenty of lions wandering about in the brilliant crowd, and they are duly pointed out by Studs to his young cousin, who is as yet too newly “out” to know

many of them by sight. There is the general who only yesterday returned from covering himself with glory in putting down an insurrection in the Undiscovered Islands, and who is now making his first appearance in the character of a lion. There goes one of the two Irish members who last week distinguished themselves by attempting to throttle one another in a lobby of the House of Commons. And that shortish, pale-faced man, with a clever-looking forehead and grizzled moustache and imperial, is the celebrated poet Blacking, whom it is the fashion greatly to admire and not at all to read.

When Chloe and Walter returned through the gallery at the top of the staircase, Lady Jane was still at her former post of observation, and as they passed near her she beckoned to Walter, and whispered to him to introduce her to his companion.

“Cert’nly, much pleasure,” replied Walter. “Chloe, want t’ int’duce you t’ Lady Jane Dorville,” and thereupon Chloe was at once engaged in conversation by that most manly specimen of womanhood.

“So you’re one of the last new puppies, I hear!” observed her ladyship, with her usual bluff and abrupt manner. “What do you think of the London Kennel—jolly or slow—eh?”

“I’m too new to have quite made up my mind about it yet,” answered Chloe, laughing; “but I’ve seen enough to show me that one grand principle is—always keep on good terms with the big dogs, and never think of trying to worry another dog unless it’s so much littler than yourself as to make the amusement a matter of absolute safety. All very well, no doubt, but I must say I think it’s rather a bore sometimes not to

give a good hearty snap when one feels so inclined."

"The deuce and all of a bore, *I* should call it," replied Lady Jane; "but that's what comes of being the slave of conventionalities and that sort of stuff. It's heaps nicer to follow my example, and do and say just what pleases you, then you snap, bark, growl or bite whichever comes natural, and no one ever expects you to do anything else."

Further conversation between the two ladies was put an end to by Walter Mixon.

"Awf'ly sorry t' int'rupt," said he, "but Lady Gough's making signs t' me to bring back Chloe, so, 'm 'fraid, I must carry her off, Lady Jane."

It was almost midnight; and the Gough's—after having smiled and chatted, and laughed with the Osnaburgh Joneses as though they were cherished friends of theirs,

were now departing, for the fashionable world thinks it necessary to get home as soon after twelve as possible on a Saturday night, so as not to have it on their consciences that the carriage and horses have been had out on Sunday—or anyhow for only a very few minutes if at all.

The sentence, “Sir Cadwallader Gough’s carriage,” enunciated mildly to an indoor flunkey results in, “Sir Corridor Gore’s carriage,” being roared to some one outside, by whom it is passed on in stentorian tones to the waiting crowd of servants beyond. Presently one of these responds and rushes off down the apparently interminable string of vehicles till he finds the right one; soon afterwards, “Sir Coll’dor Gaw’s carriage, ready!” is bellowed into the great hall of the Foreign Office, and is promptly followed by “Sir Callader Gorge—coming out!” as the

gentleman in question with his wife and sister-in-law descend the steps, enter the carriage, draw up the window in the face of an importunate linkman who never stirred a yard from the spot but unblushingly declares that he fetched both the footman and carriage entirely by himself, and drive off home.

As the carriage departs, one of the roughs in the crowd outside says to his companion, "Sir Cadwallader Gough! Why that's the name of one of the swells in them parts where us means to have a shy at the game this year! I wouldn't wonder but what he's meaning to ask some of this here lot of nobs down to his place by-and-by, and cal'klating what a lot of sport he'll show them! But may be you and I and our mates whom he don't mean to ask, may get as much fun out of his presarves as him and his mates before the winter'll be over. Eh, Bob?"

Carriages come up to the door empty and roll away full at a rapid rate, and at length the last one trots off—the crowd outside disperses—the great exhibition of humbug and humbugs is at an end, and Lord and Lady Cosmopole, the former of whom has had twinges of gout, and the latter a headache all the evening, are released from further obligation of incessantly smiling and saying pretty things, and are at liberty to put off their war paint and go quietly to bed.





CHAPTER II.

WHO TO ASK TO DINNER.

CHLOE ARGUELLE'S short experience of London society had taught her to regard a perusal of the *Times* as advisable on most days, and not only advisable, but quite a matter of necessity as a preparation for going to dine out, lest otherwise she might not have anything to talk about to any old fogey whose lot it might be to take her down to dinner. Behold her, therefore, urged by a sense of duty, for there is to be a dinner-party to-night, comfortably settling down to her newspaper

in the boudoir of Sir Cadwallader Gough's house in Eaton Square, after having had her morning's ride in Rotten Row, and lunched. She has hardly opened the paper, however, when her sister enters the room with an open letter in her hand.

"Look here," says Lady Gough; "here's a letter I've just got from Aunt Farren, asking if we can take in Edith for a bit, as she thinks her unaccountably low and out of spirits, and thinks it would be good for her to come to town to see a dentist, and do some shopping. I never could see much in Edith myself, but you'll be delighted at her coming, I know, for you and she are always such pals. Poor thing! no wonder she's out of spirits, stopping always at that dull Hazel Hall, with not a soul but her father and mother to speak to, 'twould soon bore *me* to death, I'm positive, for really Uncle and

Aunt Farren are not what one can call exactly lively. I was meaning to have another dinner-party soon, and so now I'll have it when Edith is here. I daresay it'll amuse her coming fresh from the country, and I want you to write the invitations for me this afternoon. I'm expecting a lady to see me about a cook's character every minute, so I sha'n't have time to send out the cards myself before we go out."

"All right," replied Chloe; "who am I to ask?"

"Well, first there's Lord and Lady Stau-ber," answered Alice, "I haven't asked them yet this season, and as Cadwallader supports Government, it looks well to have one of the leading men of the party here, so put them down. Then there are the Dorvilles—dear! how I dislike Lady Jane. How ever that silly Sir Henry can let her go on out-

raging the *convenances* in the way she does is a mystery to me! But she goes everywhere, and we owe them a dinner, so we may as well kill them off now. Send them a card. I rather ought to ask Lord and Lady Bolyn, and Lady Elise too—they wouldn't do badly with this lot."

"We shall want some men to make numbers even," observed Chloe; "who do you mean to have in that way?"

Lady Gough mused for a moment.

"Perhaps Mr Scriven might do for one," said she. "I'm not particularly fond of him myself, but he can talk well enough, and some people look upon him as a very rising man. Happy thought! Would he be likely to do for Edith, I wonder? It's so difficult to know how to treat these rising men, because it's so impossible to know how they'll turn out. They *may* end in failures,

or they *may* come to be Lord Chancellor's or Premiers, or something of that kind some day—and in that case one would wish one had been friendly with them and secured them when one had the chance before they'd got so swell as to be out of reach. It's as speculative as investing money—of course if one could foresee certainly which concern would pay fifty per cent., and which would come to nothing, then one would know what to be at. But anyhow, if you take my advice, you'll never snub a rising man, Chloe—it's never thoroughly safe. Oh! and I was forgetting the Shiltons—Cadwallader particularly told me to ask them, though I really can't endure that horrid strong-minded little woman with all the nonsense she talks about rights of women, and that sort of stuff! You see, though, that her husband and mine are working together at some bill or other, for

suppressing children's toys on a Sunday, and Cadw has taken to be so fond of Mr Shilton lately and to believe in him so much, that I'm convinced he's found out Cadw's soft side and buttered him up tremendously. So we can't get out of having them. And who else is there? Can you think of any one who'll do?"

Chloe meditated.

"Why shouldn't you ask the Normans?" said she. "I should like to have them, because they always seem so pleasant, and I'm sure they were uncommonly good-natured to us that night we missed our carriage and should have had to walk ever so far in pouring rain if they hadn't taken pity on us."

"The Normans!" exclaimed Alice, in a tone of much astonishment. "My dear child, what should we ask them for? Of course they're

all very pleasant and of good family, and unexceptional as far as that goes; but you must know that they're as poor as Job, and don't entertain at all, and never could be the least use to us in any way, so that it would be quite waste to send them an invitation."

"Well, but can't we have them for the simple reason that they are agreeable and good-natured?" asked Chloe. "I should think you might just as well have some one you allow to be that, if only as a pleasant change to all the rest whom you say you detest."

Alice laughed.

"Dearest Chloe," cried she, "how green you still are! Haven't you yet discovered that it isn't possible to invite all one's acquaintances to dinner; and that as, therefore, the line has to be drawn some-

where, the only satisfactory way is to draw it at the useless ones? One never dreams of inviting people who can make no return, unless in the case of any one who may be so distinguished or remarkable that everybody wants to catch them—and of course then it's a credit to have them at one's house. The idea of considering whom you like as the rule for who to invite! A pretty state of things that would be! Why you'd soon come to what they call setting up an individuality of your own; and what would become of the world if every one were to do that, I'm sure I don't know! It would be the first step to revolution, I believe."

"All right," answered Chloe placidly; "I don't mind about having the Normans particularly; only when you asked me to suggest some one, it seemed to me only natural to try and find some one pleasant. But I

must say it seems hard if one is never to consider one's natural likings and dislikings about the people one asks to one's house."

At this moment Sir Cadwallader came into the boudoir, and his wife promptly turned to him, exclaiming,—

"You're just in time to hear Chloe talking nonsense, Cadwallader. Here she's propounding the theory that we ought to let our actions be governed by our likings and dislikings; and I say that it would never do to have every one setting up their own little individualities in that way. Now ain't I right?"

"Most undoubtedly so," replied he, pompously; "and I cannot a—a—imagine that she can have been speaking otherwise than in jest. A little more a—a—experience will convince you, Chloe—I may say a—a—conclusively convince you—how impossible it is

for every person to attempt individuality. Look for instance at myself—one of the members of the supreme Parliament, one of those a—a—chosen men to whom the whole country looks for guidance, a—a—legislation, and wisdom; do even I venture to adopt the a—a—pernicious course that you advocate. Emphatically not! Notwithstanding that I have been called to belong to that most a—a—important and influential body, the House of Commons, and notwithstanding the heavy weight a—a—of responsibility inseparable from that position which weighs upon me, yet my a—a—distinguished position has not blinded me to the great truth that without a—a—union there can be no strength; and consequently, whatever question may arise, I invariably sink my own individual fancies and opinions in regard to it, and a—a—vote with the party to which

I belong. And if this is the course which a man of my well-ripened, practised, and a—a—matured judgment sees the necessity of pursuing, then surely there can be no hardship in a—a—deeming it the only safe one for women, and a—a—other men of lesser calibre, to whom the a—a—onerous office of taking part in the Government of this great and a—a—imperial country has not been entrusted.”

Here Sir Cadwallader paused to get breath after his oration. The importance of the subject had caused him to jump upon his stilts in an instant, and he had forgotten for the moment that his sonorous phrases were only addressed to his wife and sister-in-law, and not to some public meeting. After a moment's pause he went on again with less of pomposity and importance than before.

“What I came to tell you, Alice, was that I met young Roger Lloyd just now in the street, and I thought you would be glad to know of his being in London. You are aware what a splendid property he has—£30,000 a-year at least; and almost certain to succeed to an earldom some day from an unmarried old cousin. I have no doubt you will see the a—a—desirability of taking an early opportunity of being civil to him. I must a—a—take my departure to the House now, so as to be in my place if the great division should come on this afternoon.”

“Why, what’s on particularly to-day?” asked Alice. “I forget.”

“Oh, it’s this most a—a—objectionable row about Cox,” returned her husband “whether or not he can be a—a—permitted to enter the House and take his seat without any shoes or stockings on. The fellow

must be mad of course ; says he never has worn such things in his life, nor yet washed his feet, and never will. What business has a dirty ruffian like that to try and come amongst gentlemen ? I really think—it is my a—a—unalterable conviction—that the constituency who have endeavoured to intrude such an unsavoury subject amongst a society of clean and a—a—properly apparelled gentlemen, deserve nothing less than disfranchisement.”

“ Well, it does seem hard upon you certainly,” said Chloe. “ However, I suppose you can either keep him out or else kick him out somehow between you all. Of course you’ll vote against his admittance, won’t you ? ”

“ A—a—unluckily it is impossible for me to do that,” replied Sir Cadwallader. “ It is the opinion of Government that he should

be let in, and that the whole question is a—a—a momentous one,—involving, indeed, the freedom of election, and a—a—stability of the British constitution ; so, of course, I cannot go against my party, and shall vote or his admittance, whether barefooted or shod. I only trust that the disreputable cad may not take his seat anywhere near me if he gets in. I shall a—a—unquestionably change my place if he should presume to do so.”

With these words Sir Cadwallader stalked majestically out of the room, contemplating with satisfaction his own elegantly varnished boots appearing from under his dust-coloured spats ; and the two ladies returned to their interrupted task of arranging the dinner-party.

“Now I call that quite charming about Roger Lloyd,” cried Alice enthusiastically. “Just as we were wanting another man for our party, too ! The chances are that we

get him, as he's only just come to town, and won't have had time to make many engagements yet. What a catch he is, Chloe! £30,000 a-year in possession, and an earldom almost certain to follow. What a wonderfully lucky girl his wife will be!"

"No doubt those are attractions, but what's he like himself? Is he agreeable?"

"Oh, well, I have seen him, but I really don't remember much about him in that way. Rather stupid I think he was, but I'm not sure. With a fortune like that what can it matter what he's like? Why the Duchess of Clanthistle herself wouldn't turn up her nose at such a son-in-law if she could get him! If he comes here and has to take you down to dinner, Chloe, I do hope you'll be civil to him; you know I always look to you to help me to entertain my guests and make my parties go off well. But we really must stick to our

work, and finish the list to be invited. Let's see—there's Mrs Foldes—yes, we must ask her certainly. I haven't asked her once this season, and we've dined there and been to her concert besides."

"What sort of a party is she?" inquired Chloe. "All I know of her is that that good-looking Lord Patrick Fitzshannon is always dangling at her heels—is she amusing? *He* seems to think so at any rate. And who was Mr Foldes? she is very young to be a widow already."

"So she is," answered Alice; "Mr Foldes was quite an old man and tremendously rich, and her father made her marry him before she was seventeen—straight from school in fact. Then her husband died a few years after, and as by that time her father and mother were dead also, and as she has no children or near relations of any kind, she's

been pretty much alone ever since. She's rather what you call enigmatical, and I've no taste myself for enigmatical people—generally they aren't worth the trouble of solving ; and, besides, I always hate riddles and puzzles, and things of that kind that one has to give up, so she isn't in my line at all. But of course it's quite a different matter for a man on the look-out for a rich wife ; and when a person's as well off as she is, she can afford to have little eccentricities you see, as people are sure to put up with them. One of her hobbies is farming, to which she's entirely devoted—and I heard such a funny story about that the other day. Mrs Gawain Smith had a dinner-party one day early in June, and asked Mrs Foldes to it, who declined on account of having to be in the country at that date to see to the cutting of her seeds, which she said was

sure not to be done early enough unless she were there to see to it in person. When Mrs Gawain Smith got this answer she was quite mystified, and said that though she didn't pretend to know much herself about agricultural matters, yet that hitherto she had always understood that seeds were sown and not cut ! She was quite disturbed about it till some one enlightened her as to seeds being a kind of grass. However, I conclude Mrs Foldes has got her seeds off her mind by this time, as I've seen her back in town since then, so send her an invite. Now, how many'll that make us ? ”

“ Staubers two,” returned Chloe. “ Dorvilles two, Shiltens two, Bolyns three, Mr Lloyd one, Mrs Foldes one, selves and Edith four, Mr Scriven one ; that makes sixteen in all, and two ladies without partners.”

“ Ah, that'll never do,” said Alice ; “ we

must have the animals go into the ark in pairs, male and female. On second thoughts I think I'll leave out the Bolyns—you and Edith will be enough in the young lady line without having Lady Elise too. I don't exactly owe them a dinner either, for I asked them once before, only they couldn't come. And if Lady Bolyn doesn't know Roger Lloyd already, I don't know that I care to be the one to introduce him to her, and help her to set traps to catch him for Lady Elise—she's sure to begin doing that quite soon enough without my assistance. I never saw such a woman to find out and hunt after any eligible son-in-law! No—scratch out the Bolyns; that'll still leave us a man short though. Oh! there's Walter Mixon—he'll do well enough if we don't think of any one better—he's a man one meets everywhere, and very useful at balls

and things, so it's as well to keep up the cousinship between us. You'll find all the addresses in the visiting-book. Mind and post Roger Lloyd's card at once. I *am* so glad he's in town, and shall be so vexed if he can't come. It'll be such a good opportunity for you to make acquaintance with him. Dear me! I wonder who'll be lucky enough to marry him. You've got the list all right now, and the numbers even haven't you?"

"Yes," answered Chloe, "but you haven't yet told me what day to ask the people for?"

"Oh, either the Wednesday or Saturday after Edith comes. You know we always have our parties on one or other of those days; and the reason is that if we had them on any others, and some of Cadwalader's fussy constituents down at Cwm Eithin were to hear of it, they might take

it into their heads that he wasn't attending enough to his work—by which they mean their stupid little affairs—and begin making a bother about it. Constituents always think their members should be slaving perpetually at the House and looking after their interests. As if the House was likely to trouble itself about any poky little constituency; and as if any member ever cared for anything connected with his constituents except their votes! However, the constituents have to be kept quiet of course, so it wouldn't do to let them suspect that Cadwallader isn't as constant in his attendance at the House whenever it is sitting as they fondly imagine, and that half the time he's at the club, or theatre, or opera, or somewhere else amusing just like every one else. He manages to put in an appearance at a decent number of divisions, and pretends to have the welfare of

Cwm Eithin desperately at heart, and then the people there are quite satisfied, and delude themselves with the belief that he's always toiling for them in the stupid old House! Such rubbish as they talk about their interests too! If one man wants a railway and another doesn't, how's it possible to consult the interests of both of them?"

"In fact, then," said Chloe, "constituents as a race are unreasonable tyrants, whom it is incumbent on their members to take in as much as possible!"

"Pretty much so," answered Alice; "but I must go now, for there's a ring at the bell, and it's sure to be the lady I've been expecting about the cook's character. It's that cook I told you about that I discharged for thieving; when there was company, she did very well in general, but at other times the cooking used to be quite disgraceful, and

then at last I found out that she sold lots of the soup, meat, and wine and things given out for cooking, and just made our dinners out of odds and ends that were left. How cross Cadwallader used to be with me at that time about the undrinkable soups we had, and about everything else that was ill done, I remember—just as if I could help it! But of course there's no need to say anything of all that to this lady to-day. I might be expected to prove it all you know, and I'm sure I couldn't do that; and besides, one never likes giving a servant a bad character; so I shall say all I conscientiously can in favour of the woman, who really did know how to cook very well when she chose." And so saying Alice hurried off to receive her visitor, and humbug her on the subject of the cook's character.



CHAPTER III.

MEDITATIONS OF A DÉBUTANTE.

AS soon as Alice had left her, Chloe wrote and despatched the requisite invitations, and then took up the *Times* to go on imbibing from that unfailing fountain of dinner conversation. But her thoughts were wandering in another direction, and she quickly laid the paper aside again in order to meditate upon a question which she had frequently pondered already since her *début*, and as to which she had not yet succeeded in making up her mind. This knotty question was—what part should she

take in this world of humbug to which she was being introduced? There was within her a natural and instinctive love of truth which made all insincerity and falsehood wholly antipathetic to her; should she act according to the dictates of this sentiment? or should she stifle and ignore it, throw herself heart and soul into society, and be a humbug of humbugs? That she had a decided individuality of her own was a thing which had by no means dawned upon her as yet; but she had it nevertheless, and was in fact feeling after it unconsciously, and trying to let it have fair play just because she could not help doing so. This individuality urged her to abhor humbug. But then might she not be mistaken in this dislike? After all, if truthfulness were really as necessary and beautiful as she had imagined, then how came it that the great

world seemed able to get on so well without it? Was society perhaps a power above, and stronger than truth, and therefore able to dispense with it at pleasure?

To turn against all humbugs would be out of the question; for in that case she would have to begin at Alice, who was false and superficial, quite as a matter of course, and evidently never had a qualm as to the scores of untruths which she uttered or otherwise expressed daily. Yet though Chloe saw that clearly enough, she knew also that Alice was good and kind, and like a mother to her; and Chloe's affections were closely entwined round this only near relation that she possessed, and she could not believe it possible for her to do any great wrong. Certainly matters seemed very confusing when one came to think about them seriously, and it was very hard to settle whether to go in

for honesty or for conventionalism—in other words—unblushing lying!

Not to be conventional would be to act differently from other people, which would be a certain way to cause the downfall of one of Alice's dearest hopes, viz., that her sister should be a success in the world and do credit to her chaperone. It seemed cruel to inflict this disappointment upon poor Alice after all the trouble she had taken about Chloe's coming out; and besides that, it would be so pleasant to give pleasure to the sister she loved! Chloe thought that after all that had been done for her it would be very ungrateful not to try and let Alice have the reward she desired, and, after all, to be a success in the world does not appear a very hard fate to a pretty and not stupid girl of seventeen.

Then Lady Jane Dorville came into her

mind. Her ladyship's style of bluntness, independence, and doing fearlessly whatever she pleased, had an honesty and downrightness about it which was far more attractive to Chloe than the conventionalities and artificialities of the rest of the world. What if she, too, were to tread the same path? But no, that would vex poor Alice too terribly, for Alice did so love the conventional. And as Chloe's standpoint in regarding life was to a great extent determined by what would please Alice, therefore she resolved to resist her inclination to imitate Lady Jane. A happy escape for the latter this was, if she had but known it! For Chloe's natural gifts in the masculine line were far greater than those of the older lady; and had the *débutante* chosen it, she would quickly have caught up and surpassed the performances of Lady Jane in that way, who would have found

herself impelled to endeavour to keep up her superiority by strengthening her bad language to such a degree as must have inevitably destroyed every shred of peace of mind that still remained to her.

But the worst of resolving upon trying to satisfy Alice was that Chloe knew that the culminating point of the success which her sister coveted for her, was that she should make a brilliant marriage ; and to this she felt an immense objection, for the very excellent reason that she didn't want to marry at all. Of course it might be all very well for any one who fell a victim to that absurd disorder called falling in love ; but for her own part she was quite convinced that she should never do anything so ridiculous ; and really, to any one not in love, how would it be possible to put up with any one as a constant life companion ? Not a man had she ever

seen who would be endurable to live with—she was sure of that. She knew plenty of them who did capitally to talk, walk, ride, dance, play lawn-tennis, or flirt with ; but to have to live with them would be quite another matter. One, who played lawn-tennis well, was awfully stupid ; another, who danced to perfection, was bad tempered ; a third was most agreeable to talk to, but quite too horribly ugly and sickly-looking. In short, there was some fault or other to be found with them all—some reason why they failed to please in any capacity except the particular one in which she had found them satisfactory. But a husband would have to be tolerated in *all* capacities ! Certainly getting married would be a dreadful bore. Still, she knew that a good marriage was considered to be the finishing touch and final seal of bringing a girl out successfully.

Alice had told her so again and again, and every one else said the same also ; if she were to fail of doing this, Alice would be most grievously disappointed. Altogether, therefore, Chloe began to think she could not very well avoid doing as other girls did, and would have to try to secure for herself as satisfactory an "establishment" — how she detested that expression !—as possible.

This Roger Lloyd, now, that she had just been told about—what was he like? she wondered. It was very evident that Alice would be only too charmed to welcome him as a *beau ideal* of a brother-in-law.

And then it suddenly struck her, what a nuisance it must be to every rich and eligible young man to know that there was no chance of any woman caring for him for himself, but only for what he was worth. He could not possibly help knowing that such was the case,

considering how openly every one always spoke of matrimony as a commercial transaction. She should hate to be such a man herself, and wondered how any of them ever made up their minds to get married at all under the circumstances. However, almost all men were extraordinarily conceited, and so she supposed the vanity of each one who married must make him believe himself to be an exception to the general rule, and to have genuinely conquered the affections of his wife by his own surpassing merits! Yet how could an eligible man avoid knowing that he was regarded solely as an animal to be laid traps for and caught if possible, either for the setter of the trap herself, or else for some daughter, sister, cousin, friend, or relation? How horrid it must seem to a man to know that any girl had only to hear his rent roll to be at once prepared to marry him, and pretend to love

him, without troubling herself one jot as to what his own real personality might be!

As she thought of all this her gorge rose at the mere idea of such things, and she made an involuntary face of intense disgust.

But, after all, it seemed absurd not to be able to see things in the same light as other people did, and why should she want to set herself up against the opinion and practice of every one about her, and especially of her dear Alice? She very much doubted whether Alice had ever gone through the mysterious falling in love process with Sir Cadwallader, and yet, certainly, they seemed to get on together very contentedly, and there was no shadow of unhappiness about Alice.

Well, it would be very unkind not to gratify Alice's ambition if possible, Chloe supposed, and she thought, what a good thing it would be, if only she could contrive to bring

herself to the same state of mind, so that she might feel ready to throw herself headlong into the arms of whoever might be a sufficiently good match, without so much as waiting to see him first. A very good job if she never had to see him at all, either first or last, thought she ruefully; she wouldn't object to a husband on those terms!

What was this Roger Lloyd going to be like, she wondered.

Here her meditations were cut short by the arrival of visitors, and then came driving, calling, shopping, afternoon tea-fights, etc., which fully occupied her till dressing time. She had barely time to fulfil her duty to her dinner partner by skimming through the *Times* whilst the maid did her hair, and had no leisure for any further reflections on that day.





CHAPTER IV.

HUMBUGS AT DINNER.

EDITH FARREN'S visit to London got postponed to a few days later than had been originally intended, so it happened that she did not reach the Goughs' until the afternoon of the day on which the dinner-party was to take place, whereat Mr Roger Lloyd was to make his appearance. On her arrival she found Alice in the drawing-room alone, and by her was immediately greeted with overflowing cordiality.

"Dearest Edith ; how charmed I am to

have you here at last ! Only I am so vexed not to have been able to send to meet you at the station ! I tried so hard to plan and contrive to do it, but somehow or other it couldn't be managed after all ; but I was so provoked at having to leave you unmet ! However, I knew you had your maid to take care of you. It is *so* dear of you to have come to pay us a visit ; and *so* good of your father and mother to spare you to us ! How are they ? Quite well, I hope ? Come and have some tea—you must want it after your journey. You poor dear thing ! To think that you had to find your own way here from Euston Square, and that I couldn't send for you ! I can't *tell* you how annoyed I was about it ! ”

Alice ran on glibly with this and much more to the same purpose without being in the least degree discomposed by the know-

ledge that it had, in fact, never entered her head for a moment that there was any necessity to send to the station. It sounded polite to say so, all the same; and she rarely let slip an opportunity of keeping her tongue in full humbugging practice.

Edith, whose rural simplicity disposed her to take it all for truth, began to feel quite self-reproachful for having—however involuntarily—caused her cousin so much distress. She was earnestly repeating assurances of how civil the porters had been, how she had never dreamt of being met (which was not exactly true either, as she certainly had rather expected that attention—people always met trains in the country)—how perfectly well she and her maid had got on, and how very sorry she was that Alice should have been worried on her account, when Chloe came rushing into the room to welcome her, and

caused a change in the conversation. The two were great friends, and were delighted to meet again ; but Chloe was greatly struck by the change that had taken place in Edith's appearance since last she had seen her, and thought it was no wonder for Mrs Farren to have been disturbed at it. Edith looked ill, dejected, and care-worn ; and now and then when she was not talking, a sort of scared look came into her face which Chloe had never seen there before, and which made her feel quite anxious as to her friend's state of health. Chloe inwardly determined to take the first possible opportunity of discovering the cause of these melancholy looks ; but there was no chance to do so just then, for visitors dropped in one after another, and had to be talked to and given tea ; and when the last of them had departed it was time to dress. So after taking Edith to her room and seeing

she was comfortably established there, Chloe hurried off to attend to her own toilette and prepare for encountering the as yet unknown Mr Lloyd.

That she should have speculated a good deal about him was inevitable ; for she had heard his charms and attractions expatiated upon plentifully, and could not fail to perceive that every opportunity was to be given her for making a favourable impression on him ; and that should she secure him as a husband, she would be considered to have performed her duty in the most satisfactory manner possible. The reason of Lady Elise Bolyn's not having been asked to-night was perfectly obvious to her. Alice meant to have no rival to divide his attention at his first introduction to her sister ; for Edith, who was rather plain, not clever and bright in conversation, and somewhat apt to be

dowdy in her dress, except when it was superintended by some person of better taste than either she or her mother possessed, would never occur to Alice as being likely to attract any man's notice when Chloe was present.

Chloe had thoroughly understood the state of affairs, and knew quite well what was expected of her, and had been making most conscientious efforts to bring her own thoughts and sentiments into harmony with her sister's. After all, why should she not do her best to gratify Alice, and "go in" for this very eligible young man? Very likely it wouldn't be worse to have him for a husband than any one else; and if she were never to marry at all, Alice would be quite in despair she knew. His wife would undoubtedly be in a position to have everything she wished for, and certainly that would be very pleasant; indeed, the prospect would be a most

attractive one if only there were no husband attached as a necessary part of it !

The worst of it would be, though, that every one would know so well what was going on. That would be quite unendurable ! She fancied she could already hear people laughing and sneering and talking about the girl who had set her cap at young Lloyd, and stuck to him like a leech till she caught him, and so on. What an intolerable idea that was ! To stoop to doing this thing that she was contemplating would be bad enough anyhow ; but to have the whole world perceiving and commenting on it would make it a hundred times worse. Then, too, supposing after all she were to fail of captivating his affections it would be in everybody's mouth that she had thrown herself at the head of a man who wouldn't condescend to have her ! To such a depth of humiliation she would

never, never expose herself, not even to please Alice.

But still (unless he should prove in any way especially repulsive and disagreeable) there would be no harm in trying to make herself pleasant to him, provided it were done so that no one else should be able to observe it, and so that other people might imagine that she gave herself no more trouble about him than about any other person. She might manage to appear rather to shun than to court him; and then no one in the world, not Alice, nor Edith, nor any one, could suspect the degrading truth that she was ready to marry him if he chose to ask her.

That *was* a degrading truth! Here she was actually contemplating as a possible husband and lord and master a person whom she had never even seen! The idea made her furious with herself, and her whole na-

ture had risen in rebellion at it, till it seemed for a while quite impossible she should so far lower herself in her own eyes. But she was only seventeen ; and as upon a girl of that age the opinions and ways of thinking of the people amongst whom she lives are sure to tell greatly, therefore it was hardly wonderful that the determination at which Chloe finally arrived should have been very largely influenced by the tone of mind of Alice, and of the set with whom she was brought into daily contact. One upshot of all her deliberations had been to make her resolved to carry off Mr Lloyd if possible—for which she heartily despised herself. But at the same time she had vowed mentally to be so guarded in her behaviour that not even the most lynx-eyed of chaperones should have occasion to guess that she was “applying for the situation of Mrs Roger Lloyd,” as she called it to herself,

This, then, will give some idea of the frame of mind in which Chloe left her room and descended the stairs when the last finishing touches had been put to her toilette on the night in question.

When she reached the drawing-room the Shiltons were just arriving, and Chloe, well knowing her sister's cordial dislike for "rights of women" people in general, and Mrs Shilton in particular, could hardly keep her countenance as she listened to the gushing welcome accorded to that lady by Alice.

"*Dear Mrs Shilton!* I'm so *glad* to see you looking none the worse for that meeting at St James' Hall that I heard you were to speak at this afternoon. For the extension of political rights to maids of all work, wasn't it? It must be so terribly fatiguing to have to take part in those public meetings, I should think, but when you have so noble and worthy

an object for your exertions, I daresay you never think of the sacrifices you make for it. I'm sure all of us poor women who haven't your brains and energy, can never be grateful enough for all you go through on our behalf—it's really quite too admirable of you."

In society Lady Gough was noted for having "quite remarkably good manners, you know;" and she had gained this distinction by making it her pride to be able always to say the right thing to everybody, and to convey to whomsoever she might be talking the impression that that particular individual was one of her most especial friends. "It pleases them, and it does me no harm," as she once remarked to Chloe when the latter had demurred somewhat to this style of behaviour. Of course now and then she would refresh herself by snubbing some person who might be so completely nobody as to be

treated in that way with impunity ; but even then the snub would be administered from lips wearing a sweet smile that long habit had made natural to them whenever speaking to “ company ” of any kind.

On the arrival of Mrs Foldes she was received with eager inquiries about her farm. “ I do *hope* it goes on well. I should so *love* to come and see it some day if you’ll let me. I always think farming must be one of the most fascinating and rational occupations possible.”

And on Lady Jane Dorville also was bestowed just the same effusiveness and apparent entire sympathy of feeling, till Chloe, having been recently reading Molière’s *Misanthrope*, could not help recalling the lines :—

“ Non, je ne puis souffrir cette lâche méthode
Qu’affectent la plupart de vous gens à la mode ;

Et je ne hais rien tant que les contorsions,
De tous ces grands faiseurs de protestations,
Ces affables donneurs d'embrassades frivoles,
Ces obligeans diseurs d'inutiles paroles,
Qui de civilités avec tous font combat,
Et traitent du même air l'honnête homme et le fat.
Quel avantage a-t-on qu'un homme vous caresse,
Vous jure amitié, foi, zèle, estime, tendresse,
Et vous fasse de vous un éloge éclatant,
Lorsqu'au premier faquin il court en faire autant ? ”

Chloe's natural inclinations prompted her
to agree with Alceste :—

“ Sur quelque préférence une estime se fonde,
Et c'est n'estimer rien qu'estimer tout le monde.”

But, after all, every one seemed to go on
just the same now-a-days as they had done
in Molière's time ; so why not Alice as well
as another ?

When Lord Stauber arrived and caught
sight of Mrs Shilton's face—well known to
and dreaded by all officials of the Education
Department — a cold shiver ran down his

marrow, and he earnestly wished it were in his power to have himself instantly summoned away on urgent affairs. If he could only have telephoned to his private secretary to despatch a messenger in search of him immediately! What had brought him there that night was the having heard from a friend, in whose judgment he put great confidence, that the cook at Pomponious Ego's (by which nickname Sir Cadwallader was often irreverently designated behind his back) had an idea of *riz de veau aux champignous* which was really quite too delicious—indeed it might be called sublime. And Lord Stau-ber, being a thorough epicure, had eagerly accepted the Goughs' invitation, in hopes that the said *entrée* might be selected for dinner on that particular occasion. But, alas! even if it were—how would it be possible to do justice to its flavour with Mrs Shilton beside

him, dinning into his ears the importance of having instructions upon farriery printed in the third and higher standard school books, and of specially examining girls on that subject? The prospect filled him with dismay; but he let no sign of it appear as he followed his wife into the room and shook hands with those whom he knew there. To his *bête noir* Mrs Shilton he was especially cordial, for he remembered the desirability of retaining her husband's support in the House, and greeted her with that hail-fellow-well-met sort of *bonhomie* which is often affected by those who have some special topic in common to which the general world are strangers, and which was immensely flattering to the little woman's feelings—as he meant it to be. “I'll manage to keep out of her way before dinner, at all events,” said he to himself with a feeling of relief from the instant danger; “what an

intense bore she is though ; and what an evil fate it was that made the Goughs ask her here to-night ! ”

The last guest to arrive was Mr Lloyd. Chloe felt a nervous thrill of excitement as his name was announced, and gave a keenly scrutinising glance at the quiet, gentleman-like, very boyish-looking man who came into the room.

“ Don’t look bad, only so awfully uninteresting ; but oh, how young he looks ! ” was her immediate verdict on him. “ Lucky I hadn’t calculated on mixing up love with matrimony, or I’d have been dreadfully sold ; certainly *he’s* not the man to inspire romantic passion in anyone’s breast. Why, he’s a mere baby ! ”

Dinner being ready, they all paired off and went downstairs ; the host and hostess with Lord and Lady Stauber respectively, Mr

Shilton with Lady Jane, her husband with Mrs Foldes, Walter Mixon with Mrs Shilton, Mr Scriven with Edith, and Roger Lloyd with Chloe.

Arrived at the dining-room, Lord Stauber breathed more freely on discovering that Mrs Shilton's seat was not anywhere near his ; and when he took up the elegantly ornamented *menu* and saw the much-desired words, *riz de veau aux champignons*, appearing thereupon, his spirits rose greatly, and the world seemed to him altogether a brighter and better place of habitation than it had done a few minutes before.

Alice was careful always to have a good cook, for it was a favourite saying of hers, "People respect you more if you give them a good dinner." And the excellence of some *bisque aux Ecrivisses* and *soles à la Normande* soon made Lord Stauber forget the

presence of Mrs Shilton, and cheered him to bestow upon Lady Gough a most learned discourse upon his favourite gastronomic topics ; and he might be heard chuckling as he recounted the hardihood of Lady Capmoor, with whom he had recently dined, and who had actually indulged her guests with *pommes de terre à la Lyonnaise*, although there was to be a dance at her house on that very same night !

At the opposite end of the table Sir Pomponious Ego and Mr Shilton were happily engaged in discussing a bill which they were jointly endeavouring to bring into the House of Commons for the suppression of all children's toys on Sundays.

“ But I don't see how you could possibly carry out this scheme of yours,” said Mrs Foldes, after listening in quiet amusement to what the two senators were talking about.

"How are you to prevent toys being played with on a Sunday, unless you destroy them all on the Saturday night? And if you do that there won't be fresh ones ready by Monday. Do you intend to do away with them altogether?"

"Allow me to explain our plan to you," answered Mr Shilton eagerly. "What we contemplate is to have a thoroughly efficient supervision, either by police or specially appointed officials, to ensure every toy being locked away from the children on Saturday nights; the exact hour by which it should be done we have not yet determined, but probably about seven o'clock."

"But what if the parents don't take your view of the matter, and choose to unlock them again on Sunday morning?" inquired Mrs Foldes.

"It is that a—a—identical point which

Shilton and myself were considering to-day," replied Sir Cadwallader, "and I a—a—mean *we* have—"

"By no means *we*," interrupted Mr Shilton, deferentially; "the elucidating spark scintillated from your brain, Sir Cadwallader, not mine."

"A—a—was it indeed?" continued the baronet with a gratified smirk, "perhaps so—but it is a—a—immaterial! However, as I was saying, the way to meet that difficulty will be to instruct the police to make frequent visits of surprise on Sundays at all houses within their beat where there are children residing, and to make a—a—the closest investigations for any a—a—symptoms of the toys having been removed or a—a—displaced since the locking-up on the previous night. And furthermore, we have it in contemplation to provide and a—a—enact that half the fine to be inflicted for any breach of the law, shall

be awarded to the informer. By which contrivance—a—a—I may say, ingenious contrivance—we hope to secure the co-operation of numerous unofficial personages, such as nurses, visitors, domestics, governesses, casual passers-by, etc., in reporting faithfully any departure from the law whereof they may a—a—become cognisant. A—a—I think I have stated the scheme accurately, Shilton?”

“*Most* accurately, my dear sir,” replied the zealous Mr Shilton; “you have expressed our intentions with your accustomed lucid eloquence.”

“Ah! England ’ll be a charming country when it comes to be governed like that,” observed Mrs Foldes. “Every one to spy upon every one else, and get paid for finding out his neighbour’s misdeeds! Constant visits of surprise from policemen, who will of course have latch keys to every door, so as to be able

to walk in at pleasure! Looked after in that truly grandmotherly fashion, crime must speedily become unknown among us, no doubt!"

At this point Lady Jane joined into the conversation.

"What on earth is all this you're saying?" exclaimed she. "Great blue-coated, helmeted policemen to be poking their noses in on us when and how they choose! All I can say is that when *that's* the law, I won't stay to put up with it; I'll emigrate, make a clean bolt somewhere or other, and, by Jingo! so'll every one else with any sense in their noddle, you'll find. I suppose, too, you'll put down walking in Hyde Park on Sundays, and going to the Zoo, and in fact every kind of amusement, except twiddling of thumbs?"

Mr Shilton was so ardent an admirer of the aristocracy, that it was quite painful to him to hear the daughter of an earl attributing to

him sentiments of which she disapproved, and imagining that he could wish to interfere with the exalted class to which she belonged. He could hardly wait for Lady Jane to finish her sentence, before beginning to repudiate such intentions.

“If your ladyship will forgive me for saying so,” exclaimed he, “you have not wholly apprehended what we have in contemplation. There is a special clause in the bill to exempt from police visits all houses rated above a certain value ; for we feel confident that our upper classes may safely be trusted to do what is right in the matter. It is the lower and uneducated masses for whom we feel bound to legislate ; they it is that the nation must step in to rescue—by force if need be—from temptation and weakness, and to compel to ensure for their children a quiet Sunday, to be given wholly to pious

thoughts and exercises ! For we know that the week-day time of these poor children is occupied fully by school and work ; and so we are convinced that their sole chance of ever learning to love religion is to cause them to give up Sunday to it wholly, by preserving them from all temptation to think of other than religious subjects on that day. We recognise that the State is jointly responsible with parents for the eternal and temporal welfare of children ; therefore if the parents neglect their duty, then the State must step in and replace them. But far be it from us to desire to include in one common legislation rich and poor, whose widely-differing circumstances necessarily demand an equally different treatment ! The Sunday closing of Hyde Park, the Zoological Gardens, and similar places of innocent recreation for ladies and gentlemen would be an

arbitrary, and, I may say, needless measure. For go to the Zoological Gardens, or walk by Rotten Row, or between Stanhope Gate and Apsley Gate at church time on Sunday mornings, and how many people will you find there? You might count them on the fingers of your hand! We feel strongly there is no need to interfere with the religious education of our upper classes; who have not only ample time and opportunity for acquiring religious knowledge on every day in the week, but are also insensibly aided upwards and improved morally by the tone of those around them, and the elevating influence of the society with which they are in daily contact."

Lady Jane had an aversion to long words and House of Commons style of speaking, so she turned for a change to Mr Lloyd, who was sitting between her and Chloe, and remarked,—

“ Well, all their interference about the toys seems to me five-shillings-fine-rot ! People should be let to go to the bad or the good just as they please, to my mind, and children had a sight better be let alone altogether. Don’t you think so ? ”

It should here be observed that “ five-shillings-fine ” was a device whereby Lady Jane managed to convey any expression so strong as to incur that penalty, and yet to avoid offending her uneasy conscience. There was nothing in it that was actual swearing, but every one—with any wits—must see what it meant ; so that it really was quite safe, and at the same time deliciously manly and daring ! She wondered how Mr Lloyd—whom she had never met before—was impressed by it, and whether it did not astonish him a little. This it certainly did, though it was not till some time afterwards that

he guessed darkly at the meaning of the phrase. Lady Jane was altogether rather a novel experience to him.

“ Well, I’m quite clear that the poor children’s toys oughtn’t to be touched at all events,” answered he ; “ but I don’t think I agree with you about always leaving children to themselves. You see they’re apt to have odd tastes about sucking spouts of boiling kettles, falling into fires, rolling down from high places, putting whatever they can lay hands on down their throats, and such things ; so that if they were never to be interfered with at all, the population of the world would probably soon come to an end. I think there’s a medium between too much and too little looking after.”

“ Ah, that’s your line, is it ? ” replied Lady Jane, somewhat contemptuously. “ Moderation, *juste milieu*, and all that sort of thing.

But that don't do now-a-days, when every one's expected not only to have a side, but also to try and get nearer than any one else to the extreme edge of the side as well. Your betwixts and betweenes don't go down at all. For my part I'm a Bohemian myself. I like to see what's natural, and hate the effort to make every one alike from childhood up by jamming and cramping 'em all into one universal mould of conventionality. Why are we to be so confoundedly ashamed of the nature we were born with ? And why should we be always aiming at making the poor thing dance in fetters ? ”

True sentiments, Lady Jane, but not what you yourself practice, all the same. Bohemianism by no means excludes humbug, and you dance in fetters as much as the rest of the world. The only difference is that whereas most people affect a forced conven-

tionality, you have chosen to assume an equally unnatural unconventionality.

Mr Lloyd was a little puzzled what to answer. Though there was a ring of truth in what Lady Jane said, yet she was herself displeasing to him, and that set him against agreeing with her ; he had an idea that she must be in the wrong somehow or other, only that he was not quite sure how.

“ I like people to be natural, certainly,” he replied ; “ but I don't see how any one is to get rid of all restraints, as you advocate, unless he cuts his fellow-creatures absolutely, and goes to live quite alone. I don't want to do that for my own part. According to Macleod Campbell every one belonging to a society has an individual debt to discharge to it, and I'd sooner take the trouble to try and do that than be a hermit.”

"A debt!" exclaimed Lady Jane; "what debt does he mean?"

"Why, that we owe to the public, as our contributions to its wisdom, to act out our own convictions, and do our part to give it a healthy tone," returned Mr Lloyd. "That's what he says, and I don't think he's far wrong either."

"Act out our own convictions. That's the very identical thing that *I* want to see done!" cried she triumphantly.

"Is it indeed?" answered he, innocently. "I beg pardon then, for I hadn't understood you rightly. I thought you meant that every one was to act out their own whims and fancies, which aren't quite the same as convictions, are they?"

Meanwhile Chloe, on the other side of Mr Lloyd, was looking straight into her plate without any appearance of attending

to what he was talking about, although in reality she was listening with much curiosity for what he had to say upon a subject which was very attractive to the young mind going through its process of sophistication. There was an indefinable something about him which told her he was not one of the regular men about town with whom she had generally had to do since leaving the schoolroom and coming out ; and this, added to his juvenile appearance, gave her a suspicion that he, too, had still to be subjected to the same ordeal of sophistication as herself. Consequently she felt as if there were a sort of comradeship existing between them, and she wanted to hear in what light he regarded this great fact of falsehood, humbug, conventionality, or whatever name it might be called, which every one else seemed to acquiesce in so readily, and to which she

nevertheless found it so hard to reconcile herself. He became therefore to some slight degree interesting to her, even in spite of the antagonism she had felt towards him from the moment when she had definitely made up her mind that she should marry him if possible; for that resolution had caused her pride a pang which she could not help revenging on the unconscious cause of her humiliation.

She had not, however, at all forgotten her determination not to let her purpose be seen; and, knowing what sharp eyes were watching her, she was careful during the whole of dinner to talk but little to him, and give the impression that she was rather holding aloof from than seeking to attract him. By this means she had quite deceived Alice, who was observing her from the other end of the table, and was dismayed to see how indifferently Chloe and Mr Lloyd seemed to

get on together. Really, after all Alice had said to incite her sister to be ambitious for so excellent a match, after asking the young man to the house on the very first opportunity, after sending him down to dinner with her, after carefully excluding a possible rival, it was too vexatious to behold such an unpromising commencement of acquaintance. Poor Alice fretted and fumed internally, wondering how any girl *could* be so blind to her best interests; and whether Chloe expected to meet with future peers of immense wealth at every turn? Of course Lady Gough would have been in raptures if only she had known what influence she had really had, and the decision at which Chloe had actually arrived. But that happiness was lost to her through her sister's extreme caution and nervous horror of letting any one guess the resolution of which she was so heartily ashamed.



CHAPTER V.

LADY GOUGH THINKS CHLOE UNACCOUNTABLE.

DINNER at last over, the ladies ascended to the drawing-room and sorted themselves into various groups. Lady Gough devoted herself, as in duty bound, to the two chief ladies; Mrs Foldes and Chloe discovered that they possessed a common love of animals, which supplied them with an interesting topic of conversation, whilst Mrs Shilton, failing to secure any better companion, fell back upon Edith Farren, to whom she patronisingly explained the great elevation and

development of which the female sex was capable by proper blacksmith's training. It was quite new ground to Edith, and as she didn't know what to make of it all she answered "yes," "true," "of course," "oh certainly," etc., whenever a reply seemed to be expected—thinking that it was always a safe rule to try and agree with whoever was talking to her, and little dreaming how she would be boasted of by Mrs Shilton on the next opportunity as "a very intelligent and well-connected young lady whom I met lately in society, who was thoroughly convinced by the force of my arguments, and whom I shall hope soon to see amongst our ranks, etc." For Mrs Shilton well knew what prestige it would give her to be supposed able to make converts in the upper classes.

It was some time before the gentlemen left the dining-room. Lord Stauber was sensible

that the dinner had all been good, and that, not only the *riz de veau aux champignons*, but also some *petit choux à la crème* had been quite beyond the common standard of excellence, and he thought that it would be absolutely wicked to spoil his digestion with a dose of Mrs Shilton—it would show such ingratitude to the Goughs for the superior creature comforts with which they had provided him. Therefore he kept his host downstairs as long as possible, in hopes of managing to stave off going to join the ladies until a quarter past ten, when his carriage would come to fetch him. Alas for his hopes! It was but ten o'clock when Sir Cadwallader made the move to join the ladies, so there was still a quarter of an hour's peril to be endured!

It would be a very different matter thought Lord Stauber, if he could establish himself by

that pretty Miss Arguelle, and enjoy a gentle flirtation with her till the carriage came. That would be a delightful way of spending the time, which he was sure it would be good for the digestion, and he resolved on trying to accomplish it. Therefore, on reaching the drawing-room, he slipped past Mrs Shilton whilst her back was turned, made straight for a seat in front of Chloe and Mrs Foldes, and immediately plunged into conversation with them in order not to give his enemy an opportunity of catching him unoccupied.

“So you’re discussing cows are you?” said he. “I shouldn’t have imagined them to be very interesting, except as necessary machines for milk, butter, cheese, beef, and so on. Aren’t they as stupid as all other animals, except dogs?”

“Oh, Lord Stauber!” exclaimed Chloe, “I’m sure you can’t ever have had to do

with them much, or you wouldn't say that. Animals are no stupider than men in their way, and they have just as much individuality too. Some are sharper than others, of course, and there are animals and animals just as there are men and men. Did you ever notice how rabbits and magpies will let a carriage drive by them and never stir—but just try and get near them on foot and they're off directly. The old ones have discovered that they never get shot at from wheels; but how do the young ones find it out, I wonder? I'm sure that shows cleverness."

"As for my cows," chimed in Mrs Foldes, "it's quite astonishing what discrimination they have in selecting the most favourable moments for breaking into the wheat, or mangels, or plantations. For that purpose they invariably choose Sundays, or else after the men have left work in the evenings, so

that there's no one handy to drive them out of mischief. Then, again, as to their food—you couldn't be more dainty yourself. 'I don't think as there is a more pertiklerer animal than a cow in the world,' is what my cowman tells me."

Before Lord Stauber could reply he heard the voice he dreaded at his elbow.

"Could you spare a moment to me, Lord Stauber?" it said. "I wish to speak a word with you in regard to that great question about introducing into the Education Act, a clause to have girls instructed in the rudiments of smith's work. Ah, how glorious it would be to have a college devoted to that purpose! We might call it the Defoe College."

"Pray, why the Defoe College?" asked Mrs Foldes.

"Why, to commemorate the great man,"

replied Mrs Shilton, "who was so far in advance of his age as to have proposed the institution of a college for the education of women, and to have endeavoured to reform the position of women by insisting on their right to share the advantages then confined to men. But I fear the Defoe College I should like is as yet an impracticable scheme, and we must content ourselves with what is clearly feasible for the present. I have been considering the difficulty we shall experience of getting teachers, Lord Stauber, in consequence of the bigoted and obstinate opposition of the blacksmiths as a class, and a fresh idea on the subject has just occurred to me, which I think it most important to explain thoroughly to you before you finish drawing up the new Act."

Poor Lord Stauber glanced helplessly at the clock, and saw to his joy that

the hands were just pointing to a quarter past ten.

“I am so sorry,” said he, getting up from his seat, “so excessively sorry to be unable to stop and discuss the matter fully with you now ; I can assure you that nothing would have given me greater pleasure ! What a pity we didn’t sit next one another at dinner—it would have been such a capital opportunity for going thoroughly into this most interesting question. But, most unfortunately, I cannot possibly stay now, as my carriage is at the door, and my coachman—who keeps me in strict order—told me that one of the horses has a cold to-night, and must on no account be kept standing. I’m afraid my numerous engagements prevent my being able to make an appointment to meet you at the office just at present ; but would you kindly put what you have to say upon paper and

forward it to me? I promise it shall have my best attention."

"If she writes to me I don't so much mind," thought the noble humbug. Secretaries and waste paper baskets reduce letters to the rank of minor evils.

And then his lordship departed, leaving Mrs Foldes gravely suggesting to Mrs Shilton that, under the circumstances, it seemed as if a well-organised mission to convert the blacksmiths from their ridiculous prejudice against employing female apprentices, might be of very great service. Which idea highly commended itself to Mrs Shilton as a means whereby she might find fresh occasions to keep herself before the eyes of the world and uplift her voice in public places.

Lady Gough, during the whole evening, kept an anxious eye upon her sister's proceedings, and found them no more satisfac-

tory than they had been during dinner. When the gentlemen came upstairs Mr Lloyd stood for a few minutes near the drawing-room door, looking around him with that air of supreme indifference which young men are apt to wear when in a room full of people whom they do not know, and then commenced an indirect approach towards Chloe.

Alice watched eagerly. Would Chloe cast a glance or smile in his direction? Would she look in any way gratified at his coming? Would she give an indication, however slight, that his presence was acceptable to her? No—not one encouraging sign did she bestow upon him! When he at last reached and began to talk to her, she just answered him civilly, and no more; letting him stand beside her in silence without any effort to entertain him or keep him near her.

“Why, she treats him like the merest scorpion of a younger son!” thought Alice, impatiently. “She really might take the trouble to try and amuse him a little bit. She’s not a fool, and can talk fast enough when she likes, and yet there she sits looking as if she hadn’t two ideas in her head, and wouldn’t be able to make them meet if she had! It really is quite too provoking; and he doesn’t seem to dislike her either, if only she would be the least bit encouraging. I’m pretty sure by his manner he’s inclined to be taken with her. *Such* a catch as he is! She must be mad, I think.”

When all the guests were gone, Lady Gough asked the two girls, with apparent carelessness, what they had thought of their respective cavaliers at dinner, hoping thus to get some insight into Chloe’s opinion of Mr

Lloyd, which she did not think prudent to ask more directly.

Edith's answer was given with a ready smile.

"Oh, I liked mine extremely, thank you ! He was such a very agreeable and entertaining young man."

Which reply she would have made just the same whatever the gentleman had been like ; because she was sure it was the right thing to say to the hostess who had apportioned to her her companion.

Chloe's answer was less satisfactory.

"Well, in my opinion, £30,000 a-year is too dreadfully young. He's quite a baby ; barely out of long clothes, in fact. I must say I prefer something rather older myself."

"You absurd child !" returned Alice ;
"why, you're only seventeen yourself, and

Roger Lloyd must be two or three and twenty at least. *You've* no right to look down upon him for his youth, at any rate !”

“ Ah, but I'm sure I'm much older than him, for all that,” answered Chloe, yawning. “ Women always age sooner than men, you know. I do hope by-the-bye, dear Alice, that you have profited somewhat by the observations of the noble cook who took you down to dinner. It seems quite a pity that a cookery department shouldn't be introduced into Government on purpose for such a man as that. How zealously he would perform its duties, and how *con amore* he would throw himself into his official work !”

And Lady Gough thought that the party had not been as satisfactory as she had hoped, and that her sister was very extraordinary and unaccountable.



CHAPTER VI.

CLAIRVOYANCE.

“**N**OW, I’m going to speak seriously to you, Edith,” said Chloe next morning after breakfast, when she found herself alone with her cousin. “I insist upon knowing what makes you look so seedy? I’ve not had a chance of asking you before, but, ever since I saw you yesterday, I’ve been wondering what games you can have been up to to make you look so ill and melancholy. Have you gone and fallen in love? Or what *has* come to you?”

“Do *you* think I look ill then, too?’

asked Edith nervously. "Mamma said so, I know; but I didn't think there was anything for any one else to notice. It must be your fancy. I'm really quite well."

"Tell that to the marines—or anyhow not to your best friend and cousin, Chloe Arguelle! When people are well they don't have black rings under their eyes and pale faces and anxious, scared looks like you have. *Something's* wrong I'm certain, and you'd better tell me what it is, and see if I can't help you about it just like in old times when we were children together. Is it that you've gone and fallen in love? I find that's what mostly plays havoc with a girl's appearance just when she ought to be looking her very best!" observed Chloe, with an air of superior wisdom that was immensely comical.

"You always did consider falling in love to be a high crime and piece of folly, I

know," said Edith smiling. "But you may make your mind easy on that score as far as I'm concerned. I certainly haven't done it."

"Well, then, what is it that's the matter with you? You know very well that to talk about it—whatever it is—to me, is the best thing you can possibly do. It'll never do for you to 'let concealment like a worm i' the bud,' and all the rest of it, you know. You say you aren't ill, nor yet in love—then have you committed some fearful crime that's weighing on your conscience?"

Edith laughed and shook her head.

"Well, then, perhaps you're making up your mind to do it?"

"Not to my own knowledge, at any rate."

Chloe's forehead was wrinkled up in perplexity.

"You're worse than an acrostic in the *Weekly Dirty Clothes Bag*," said she, "for

I can make *them* out generally, but I can't *you*. You're as bad as one of the special ones given to ties to guess off. I never could find out any of them. Now are you really conscientiously certain that you aren't the least bit in love—not even in the least tiniest corner of your finger nail? Because it's a most insidious disease; and if, to your own knowledge, you had even that much of it, you might be sure that by that time it would have spread through your whole system without your suspecting its fatal and rapid progress."

"Oh, Chloe, what a tease you are! I declare solemnly I haven't a symptom of the disease, as you call it, anywhere about me. Indeed, I really am all right; there's nothing for you to be uneasy about."

"Bosh!" remarked Chloe incredulously, and again surveyed her cousin attentively. "I

don't know that you look so much ill, either, as out of sorts and wrong somehow. You look as if you'd something on your mind that's worrying you. There ! your face shows me that I've hit the mark. Ain't I right ? ”

Edith blushed and looked rather confused.

“ It's very silly to let things worry one,” said she hesitatingly ; “ but for all that one can't help doing it sometimes.”

“ Well, tell me what it is, and it won't worry you so much then.”

Edith still hesitated, and looked uneasy.

“ The real fact is,” she said at last, “ that I'm ashamed to tell you about it. It seems so childish to be upset by it. I know you'd say it's quite absurd, and laugh at me if you knew what it was.”

“ Poor Edith ! ” returned her cousin.

“ Never mind. I won't laugh more than's good for you, anyhow ; perhaps I sha'n't

think it funny, and want to laugh at all. If it's very childish, you ought to have confided it to the baby who dined here last night—he's just of an age to enter into any little infantine troubles, I'm sure. But now out with it; don't go on keeping the secret to yourself, like a hen who's stolen her nest away from the poultry house."

"Well, I always *do* have to give in to you, so I suppose I must now," answered Edith, after remaining silent for a few moments. "Perhaps, as you say, it may do me good to talk to you about this thing that is on my mind. Only I know you'll think it all ridiculous nonsense, and me a superstitious fool for troubling myself about it."

"Very good; then we'll take all that for granted. Go on."

"You must know, then, that a short time

ago, when I was staying at the Overtons, Mr Bull, the author, was there also. One day we happened to talk about clairvoyance, and he said not only that he quite believed in it, but that he had himself the gift of it. Some of the party had been laughing at it, and saying that it was all a delusion, or else a trick; he declared solemnly that it was nothing of the kind, and begged one of us to let him prove the truth of what he asserted by telling us about our own past and future lives."

"Easy enough as to the past, no doubt," put in Chloe, "because, of course, he might have found out something about you all beforehand. But, anyhow, I shouldn't have cared for the past—there's no fun in being told what one knows already."

"Well," continued Edith, "some of us were half afraid to try, and some thought it

all rubbish, and said they wouldn't; however, he urged the point so strongly, that at last we drew lots for who should make the experiment."

Edith's voice began to tremble nervously and she made a pause, evidently rather overcome at the recollection of what had passed.

"How I do wish I'd been there!" exclaimed Chloe. "There'd have been no drawing of lots then. I should have thought it such fun to hear what he'd have said, that I'd have jumped at the offer. 'Twould have been better than a novel. Alas! that such a windfall of luck didn't come in *my* way, instead of yours. Go on."

Edith made an effort to recover herself, and went on again, speaking in a low and half frightened voice. "The lot fell upon me—I can't tell you how alarmed I felt and how heartily I wished I'd never exposed

myself to such a thing ; you know I never was as brave as you are. And oh, Chloe ! when he began to speak of my future he suddenly stopped short, and a look of horror passed over his face. I asked him why he did not go on. The expression of his face remained unchanged—it was one of intense horror mingled with pity—it haunts me now, and he said he would continue if I insisted on it, but that he would rather not. The affair was getting more awful than ever to me, but I felt impelled to hear to the end, so I told him not to stop. He said that he foresaw in my life something, some deep shadow, that gave him such a sense of horror that he could not bear to speak of it. I pressed him to tell me more—to finish to the very end of all that he could see. And unwillingly I extorted from him that he had a sort of vision, or strange mental consciousness, that

some awful catastrophe was to befall my family through the instrumentality of a servant."

"And you believed him?" inquired Chloe.

"How could I help it, when his solemn, awe-struck, compassionate look and manner convinced me of his own implicit faith in the truth of every word he uttered? I was compelled to believe him—if you had been there I think you must have done so too. I can see him now, and hear his deep, grave, mysterious tones! The prophecy has haunted me ever since by day and night. I think of it and dream of it; I can't shake it off or forget it. I keep asking myself what the terrible future event can be, and whether it cannot be obviated. I have told myself that I am absurd, unreasonable, superstitious; I've tried to argue myself out of my fear—but it's been no use. Oh, Chloe! it does make me so miserable, and I do so wish I had

nerves like yours! Do you believe at all in the truth of clairvoyance?"

"My experience of life just lately since I came out hasn't led me to believe in the truth of *anything*. And if there's no truth in what one *can* see, I don't see why there should be any more in what one *can't* see. Depend upon it, clairvoyance is as much humbug as everything else, and that if Mr Bull really believed what he told you, he was simply labouring under a hallucination. He'd probably been reading something very sensational, or else he'd had a nightmare the night before, and so impressed his brain with the horrors that he couldn't get rid of them. Why, if he really could foresee all he told you, then, of course, he could have foreseen also the how, when, and where of the desperate tragedy; if he'd told you all that, now, there might have been some good in it, but as for his vague forebodings—

why, of course, it's a pack of nonsense from beginning to end. I won't allow you to think of it any more, so dismiss it from your mind on the instant!"

Edith sighed.

"I only wish that were possible," said she dejectedly; "it's so wretched to live under the shadow of this gloomy forecast. Mamma wants me to buy some clothes now I'm in London, but I've hardly the spirits to go about it. How can I tell how soon the impending cloud of misfortune may burst?" And she sighed heavily again.

Chloe contemplated her cousin with a twinkle of fun in her eyes; she could foresee that shopping was likely to be a most effective distraction and disperser of superstitious follies, but she did not think it would do to hint at that in the present lacerated state of Edith's feelings, so she only said,—

“I suppose you’d like to have no servants any more, and then the prophecy couldn’t come true. Ah ! if clairvoyance isn’t more reliable than the characters people generally give their servants, then there’s precious little need for you to trouble yourself about it.”

“How cynical you are about everything !” answered Edith. “But, I was going to tell you, that one thing that keeps the prophecy always in my mind, and makes it additionally real to me, is that I fancy I know from what quarter to dread the danger. There’s a housemaid at home whom I’ve instinctively mistrusted ever since she’s been in the house, and I can’t doubt but what the vision pointed to her. I do wish I could get rid of her, but I don’t know how to manage it, because she does her work well, and *seems* to be a good servant ; and I can’t make up my mind to disturb mamma by telling her all I’ve just

told you. So there that (to me) dreadful housemaid is, and there I suppose she must stay ; yet if only she were gone, and far out of the way, I almost believe I should be able to disbelieve in the prophecy after all. I have such a strange shrinking from her. I think it must be a sort of presentiment."

"I don't believe in presentiments," returned Chloe ; "you know you were always having them when you were little, and they never by any chance came to anything. And now I'll tell you what you're doing, Edith. You're just fretting, worrying, and bothering yourself to no earthly purpose, and keeping your poor little self in a perpetual ferment without gaining anything by it—all so much wasted exertion like a sailor's hornpipe—that's to say endless capers and efforts that never get a man an atom beyond the square inch or so of board on which he started. So my opinion

is that you want a thorough change of ideas, and that Aunt Adelaide is quite right to send you to us. You won't believe in anything after you've been here a few days—London's a grand place to convince one of the truth of Longfellow's words, "Things are not what they seem."

"Your short experience of it seems to have made you a thorough sceptic, at all events," replied Edith. "And now tell me about yourself. What do you think of your new life, and how do you like it? It must be so grand to be brought out like you are, and presented at court and all the rest of it; merely coming out in the country, like I did, seems nothing at all in comparison."

"What do I think of society, do you want to know?" returned Chloe. "Well, it's like living in a constant glare of sunshine that hasn't a scrap of warmth in it. You grin

and smile and make pretty speeches to people's faces, and then say all the ill-natured things you can about them directly their backs are turned, with the happy consciousness all the while that they are sure to be treating you in precisely the same way, which makes matters quite fair and even. And another conspicuous fact about society is restlessness. It's as bad as that most unquiet piece of water at Lodore that Southey wrote about ; always

“ Hurrying and skurrying and glittering and frittering,
Advancing and prancing and glancing and dancing,
Recoiling, turmoiling, and toiling and boiling,”

and all that sort of thing. I wonder every one doesn't get tired of it, and long for stagnation as a pleasant change.”

Here Alice joined them.

“ I'm just going to walk in the park with Cadwallader,” said she. “ Have either or

both of you a mind to come too? You'd much better; it's too fine to stop in."

"Yes, we're going out," returned Chloe; "but then there's all Edith's shopping to do. Why not come and help us about that instead of going into the park?"

"Oh no," answered Lady Gough. "For one thing I told Cadw I'd go with him; and for another thing, Mr Lloyd will be expecting us there. He asked me last night if we should be going, as he didn't care about going alone, and doesn't know a great many people here yet."

"Oh, so you're going to wheel the baby about in its perambulator," remarked Chloe, sarcastically. "But we're not coming to help to nurse the child to-day. You see Edith must make a start with her shopping, and letting her go about it alone is not to be thought of. For one fresh from Hazel Hall,

and unpractised in the wiles of London shopkeepers, to venture forth alone amongst the seductive counters that await her, would be like a vessel putting out to sea without a helm. She'd be pitched here and there, buffeted about, bewildered and bamboozled by smiling shopmen, and finally end with shipwreck on the rock of injudicious purchases. No! I mean to be Edith's steering apparatus; tell her what's worn, and defend her from the impositions of civil-tongued counter skippers, who, when they meet a green and ingenuous young party like her, will solemnly aver that some hideous old thing of last year, which they want to get rid of, is the very height of fashion, and quite the newest thing out. But you won't find *me* swallowing any nonsense of that kind."

"How can you be so ridiculous?" ex-

claimed Lady Gough. "To hear you talk one might think you were thirty at least, instead of a mere chit just out. Dearest Edith, you mustn't let her impose upon you. I'm afraid she won't be of much real good to you in spite of her swaggering! Wouldn't you like to take my maid Léontine to assist you? You'll find her a much safer guide than Chloe. She really has excellent ideas about most things, and especially about flowers for hair, and dress trimmings."

Which conveyed clearly to Chloe's comprehension that as Mr Lloyd was to be met in the park, therefore she was wanted to go there also; though Edith was quite free to go or not as she pleased. And as Chloe was determined to show no sign whatever of any inclination to run after or court him in the slightest degree, she firmly declined to consent to her sister's arrangement, and stuck

to her point in spite of all Alice's expostulation and opposition. So the end of it was that the two girls went to shop in Sloane Street, and Alice had to set off to the park with no companion but her husband.





CHAPTER VII.

MAKING CRAB.

WHEN Edith and Chloe came back from their shopping expedition, the Goughs had already returned and gone in to lunch, and the apparition of a strange stick and hat in the hall proclaimed that they had brought back a visitor with them.

“Look there,” said Chloe, pointing to the signs of a stranger; “what are the odds that Alice has gone and asked the baby in to lunch? Only, what’s become of the perambulator. I don’t see it anywhere about?”

Edith looked mystified for a moment, and then said,—

“ Mr Lloyd, do you mean ? ”

“ Of course, I do,” returned Chloe impatiently ; “ there isn’t any other child she’s likely to have picked up. And I daresay she hasn’t thought of ordering any pap for the poor little dear ! She really shouldn’t have children to feed without providing proper food for them.”

Chloe was right in her conjecture as to the visitor. That close observer, Lady Gough, noticed with satisfaction that a pleased look came into Mr Lloyd’s face when the dining-room door opened to admit the two girls, and was still more gratified to perceive that his eyes did not leave the doorway till Chloe had followed her cousin into the room. So far so good ; his dispositions were all that could be hoped for from so short an acquaint-

ance, and it seemed evident that Chloe had made a favourable impression on him. But there Alice's contentment came to an end, for on the part of her sister no corresponding sign of goodwill was to be discovered. On the contrary, Chloe seemed to take delight in openly manifesting the small account she made of the young man ; to which conduct she was impelled by two reasons. One was a desire to baffle the close observation of her sister ; and the other that she felt it to be a sort of set off for the humiliation she had inflicted on herself on his account by consenting inwardly to the prospect of marrying him before ever she had set eyes on him.

" Alice," said she suddenly, " why didn't you order a plain milk pudding—rice, or corn flour, or tapioca, or something of that sort ? "

" Why, you always say you can't bear those

puddings," answered Lady Gough. "What's made you fancy you want one to-day?"

"I never said I wanted it only for myself. Other people might like them even if I don't, and I remember I was fond of them when I was young. People ought to order things suitable for whatever guests they may have."

Then she began gravely discussing with Mr Lloyd what babies out airing in the park were likely to think of it, and ran on in this fashion till the two other ladies nearly burst out laughing at her absurdity, and the young man began to have a dim idea that her words meant more than they expressed, and that there was some joke afoot to which he had not got the clue.

The conversation presently happened to turn upon the cooking of crabs, and he said that a very good imitation of crab could be

produced out of cheese crumbled into little pieces and mixed with due quantities of butter, vinegar, mustard, salt, oil, anchovy, sauce, etc. The rest of the party had never heard of it before. Alice, who abhorred cheese in every form, but could not fail to be interested in whatever remarks fell from the lips of so desirable a young man, begged to be shown how the compound was made, and declared that it sounded quite delicious. On his complying with her request she watched the mixing process closely, pretending to be quite glad of the opportunity of learning such a useful accomplishment, though inwardly she was shuddering at the idea that any sane person could ever like such a nasty, indigestible mess, and reflecting complacently that she would herself be able to get off taking more than the tiniest possible morsel of it to taste, as Chloe was

always fond of cheese, and things of that kind, and would be sure to consume enough crab to prevent the compounder from imagining that his display of talent had been thrown away. For in Lady Gough's opinion it would be out of the question to allow any one of Roger Lloyd's importance to suppose that the exertions on behalf of society which he might choose to make in the way of crab making, were wasted upon unappreciative palates; sooner than have that happen she would be prepared even to go the length of eating the abomination herself!"

But she discovered that in relying upon Chloe's assistance she had reckoned without her host, since that young lady not only remained provokingly indifferent to the process whereby the crab was manufactured, but also flatly declined to experiment upon

it when at last finished and submitted to her approval by the compounder—who had given various indications of being more anxious to ingratiate himself with her than with any one else in the room. Alice saw that he looked disappointed at Chloe's refusal, and immediately came to his support, tasting the compound again and again, pronouncing it to be excellent, assuring Chloe she would like it of all things, and urging her to try it. Her efforts were in vain, however, for Chloe was not to be induced to change her mind. And so poor Alice—on the one hand detesting cheese and knowing that it invariably gave her indigestion, and on the other dreading the possibility of Mr Lloyd's being mortified if his crab was not eaten—felt compelled to swallow down with much outward praise and secret loathing a quantity of the (to her) nauseous mess. Still larger

would have been the proportion she would have felt bound to get through if Edith had not been there ; but luckily the latter rather approved of the crab, and assisted materially in disposing of it — every mouthful that she took exciting in Lady Gough's mind sentiments of most sincere and affectionate esteem and gratitude.

When luncheon was over and they went up to the drawing-room, Chloe's perverse humour remained unchanged. Mr Lloyd was extremely fond of music, and took up a book of songs which was lying on the open piano, and which Chloe had that morning been using.

“What charming things there are in this Schubert Album,” said he, turning over the leaves ; “and what a regular king he was of the art of setting ballads to music that suits the words exactly. I see your name outside,

Miss Arguelle ; may I venture to ask for a song ? ”

Chloe was just about to refuse when a sudden thought sent her to the piano, remarking, in a pointed manner, that she always thought it most essential for performers to select music which was adapted to the ages and tastes of their listeners. And after that preface she sang the “Cradle” song. Her voice was full-toned, fresh, and sweet, and Roger would gladly have got her to sing again ; but she gave him no chance, for the instant she had finished she jumped up from the piano, exclaiming,—

“That’s all I can do to-day. I’m not in good voice. Now, Edith, you come and sing to Mr Lloyd. I’ll play your accompaniment for you.”

Edith was overcome with nervousness at the idea of performing before a stranger, and

feebly protested her incapacity; but when Chloe insisted, of course she had to give in, and so set out upon "Twickenham Ferry," as being the song in which she felt most at home. Her performance was of the ordinary shy young lady type. With Chloe accompanying and encouraging her she got through the song tolerably successfully—only once pausing in alarm on the highest note to inquire anxiously of Chloe, "Oh dear, is that right?" and then going on again contentedly after the hasty response, "Yes—all right! Go on!"

After "Twickenham Ferry" Mr Lloyd hoped for more songs from Chloe; but in vain. To all his pleadings for one or other of his special favourites out of the Schubert Album she remained obdurate, and left his musical entertainment entirely to Edith, very greatly to the annoyance of Lady Gough.

As soon as he was gone Alice began to express her vexation.

"My dear Chloe," she cried, "I really can't conceive what has come over you to-day! You wouldn't do a thing Mr Lloyd asked you, and were barely civil to the poor man all the time he was here. Whatever has he done to offend you? I'm sure he did all he could to be civil."

"Ah, very likely," replied Chloe calmly, and without being in any way affected by her sister's reproaches. "But I don't think cheese is proper food for little children, and as I know how unwholesome you consider it to be, Alice, I must say I was astonished to hear you, of all people, encouraging its consumption. And besides, a man or baby who's got £30,000 a-year ought to keep a *chef* to do all his cooking for him, in my opinion, and ought to know nothing about the matter

himself, except whether its well or ill done. And, furthermore, it's unbecoming to his position to tolerate songs from anything less than a prima donna. You couldn't imagine that I was going to encourage him in stooping to things beneath him?"

What with such trying sentiments and behaviour on Chloe's part, and the large amount of indigestible crab that Alice had consumed, it was no wonder that she should have been unwontedly touchy and out of sorts for the rest of that day, and should have found a difficulty in keeping up the bland demeanour, and gushing, sympathetic affectation of friendship, which usually distinguished her intercourse with her innumerable acquaintances.





CHAPTER VIII.

ROGER LLOYD.

BOGER LLOYD was the only child of a rich and very extravagant man who had died when his son was only six years old, and left his large property heavily burdened with mortgages. During the long minority the estate had been well managed by the trustees, and minerals had been found upon it which had greatly increased its value, so that the mortgages were just paid off before Roger attained his majority, and he came into an unencumbered inheritance.

Though very proud in some ways yet he was a good sort of young fellow, affectionate, straightforward, quiet, and domestic in his tastes. Reflective, observant, quite capable of drawing his own conclusions from things and thinking for himself, it was his nature to be strong rather than showy, and sound than brilliant. His chief friend and companion had been his mother, with whom almost all his life had been spent. They had travelled abroad a great deal together; but as London and fashionable life were not congenial to either of them, he had gone but little into society, and had never stayed long in the metropolis.

Mrs Lloyd—well knowing the matrimonial perils to which a rich young man was liable, and having an especial aversion to the idea of her son's being ever entrapped by an actress or adventuress of any kind—had

long ago made up her mind that his best chance of safety and happiness lay in an early marriage with the first nice girl of suitable position who might take his fancy. He and his mother had lived so much alone together that he readily saw things from her point of view—being so far influenced by her as generally to consider desirable for himself whatever she regarded in that light, even though she might never have stated her wish in so many words. And thus it came about that he was thoroughly imbued with the idea that he would never feel really at home in life till he should have secured a fitting helpmate for himself, and was anxious to meet with that desirable appendage as soon as possible. He had considered the matter of what she was to be like more than most young men of his age do, and regarded the selection of a wife rather as a matter of

serious responsibility than of pleasure—which sober-minded way of regarding matrimony had been probably caused by having lived almost exclusively with a quiet, sensible, clever woman older than himself, whose society had sufficed to him, and by having never seen much of young people of his own time of life.

He cared nothing about high rank in the wife whom he pictured to himself; but had quite made up his mind that he wished the history of her and all belonging to her to be in every respect straightforward and above board, and with no queer places that would not bear to be inquired into. She must be “one of the Somebodies of Somewhere,” for, to marry a “Miss Nobody of Nowhere,” was directly contrary to his idea of what a man of good position should do, either on his own account or on that of his descendants. He

would like his wife to be indigenous to some county wherein she should have roots of ancestors, well known and accounted for though not necessarily great people, which should reach far down into past days and guarantee undoubted respectability. And as none of the young ladies living near him in the country had succeeded in pleasing his taste, his present visit to London had been undertaken in great measure with the object of trying to meet with a wife there—for it was a matter of serious annoyance to him to be still wholly fancy free, and he sighed earnestly to get his wooing and marrying satisfactorily accomplished and to be able to settle down for good.

Thanks to Lady Gough's clever management, he had been but a very short time in London before he began to feel himself on terms of intimacy in her house and with its

inmates, and the daily life which he there saw was almost a sort of revelation to the young man who had had no sisters or cousins with whom to associate, and had never had any experience of the companionship of young ladies in their own homes. Never before had he had an idea of how little monotonous—how amusing even—the *pièce de resistance* of ordinary everyday existence can become when it is sauced by the natural fun and constant little jokes of young people in a harmonious household. The chaff that went on, the half serious and half-jesting sparring that kept wits from blunting, the readiness to find amusement in any trifle, the continual state of being “after something or other,” the laughter, caused often by nothing more talented than the innate high spirits of youth, and yet irresistibly contagious; all these things were quite new and delightful to

him. Alice saw how pleasant he found this home life and took care to make him feel welcome amongst them always, and to throw him and Chloe in each other's society as much as possible. What with rides, luncheons, plays, balls, parties to Wimbledon to see the rifle shooting, parties to Richmond, water parties, etc., hardly a day passed that they did not see one another, and Roger quickly came to the conclusion that Chloe was uncommonly charming. He had been struck by her beauty the first evening he had met her, and had subsequently found her manner and conversation to be even more attractive than her good looks. She was constantly saying or doing something unexpected which made her very piquant, and there was so much of the *imprévu* about her that he never failed to find fresh zest in her company. There was no chance of being dull or hum-

drum when with her ; she seemed to have the gift of imparting to life a perpetual relish. The flavour would be sometimes sweet and sometimes tart, but whether sweet or not there it always was—a decided and ever varying flavour of some kind or other—and this was to him most fascinating. If he could get such a girl as that to marry him, what a delightful companion for life's journey she would be, he thought, and how unusually fortunate he should be !

But the one fatal obstacle to this possible happiness seemed to him to lie in herself. Could he flatter himself that she showed any disposition to return his affection ? In his frequent meditations on the subject of marriage he had always determined to guard himself sedulously against the weakness of falling in love with any one who gave no indication of preferring him to other men ;

it jarred upon his pride to imagine himself devoted to a girl who cared nothing about him; and to make an offer where there was evidently no likelihood of its being accepted, seemed to him unbecoming to his dignity as a man. Having never yet been in love in all his life—(perhaps because he had thought so much about it)—he could not understand how men could rashly expose themselves to so galling a thing as a refusal, and was firmly resolved to try and avoid it in his own case if possible. Therefore he struggled against the charm which he felt Chloe had for him, and would not give way to it until he could see some sign of her regarding him with favour. Her behaviour was a complete puzzle to him. Now and then, when they chanced to be alone together, she might perhaps vouchsafe to be pleasant and gentle; but, generally speaking, she seemed to bestow

less attention upon him than upon any of the other young men who frequented her society, and with whom she seemed always to dance, flirt, laugh, and talk, far more readily than with him. If he could have detected any encouraging symptoms he would have been only too glad to do what he felt he was on the verge of doing, and fall head over ears in love with her ; but under the circumstances he began to fear that such a proceeding would be utterly vain and foolish, and that if he did not keep a sharp look out, he would some day discover himself in the humiliating position of having lost his heart irretrievably to a girl who did not care for him one jot. If ever he fancied that she had been a little pleasanter than usual, and sought her out again in hopes of being honoured with some mark of favour—however trifling—which might show that she

distinguished him from others, then he was sure to find himself treated with absolute indifference, and left to console himself as best he could with Edith. In Edith, no doubt, he could always reckon upon finding a gentle, kindly, and sympathetic, though perhaps somewhat silly companion with whom to take refuge, and he liked her and was great friends with her. But still she was nothing like as fascinating to him as Chloe ; and he regarded having to walk about with Edith on his arm when he had hoped for Chloe, or dancing the supper dance with Edith instead of with her cousin, as being something like going to the opera to hear Lohengrin, and finding it had been changed at the last moment to *Trovatore*. Very nice in its way, but by no means the same thing.

And when Chloe held colloquies with

herself in the solitude of her own room, her reflections were after this fashion.

“I suppose if he asks me, I shall stick to what I made up my mind to before ever I set eyes on him, and marry him. But, oh dear! how odious it seems! Such a mere baby as he is! Not that I think he’s a bad baby at all—but he’s nothing better; and I don’t care about him one scrap, and never shall be able to! However, no one seems to think there’s any need for love to accompany matrimony—if there’s money and position, that’s all that’s required. It seems rather hard upon Mr Lloyd to know—as he must do—that there’s not the slightest chance of his ever being loved for himself; but then when a man’s so awfully rich, and has a probable earldom coming to him, of course he can’t expect to stand upon his own merits! It’s known quite well that whoever marries

him will only do it for his money, and no one will ever dream of her being actuated by any other motive.

“How horrid it would be to have that said of one! Can I possibly endure to make myself liable to it? Really it would be pretty nearly enough to prevent one’s taking him even if one cared about him in earnest. Nobody will ever give his wife credit for an honest affection for him; every soul will suppose her to be a hypocrite—whether she is or not. Well, I don’t mean to be *that* at any rate; mercenary I am, I suppose, and I hate myself for it, and I hate him too for being the means of making me so—but I don’t intend ever to be a hypocrite, and make believe to be devoted to him when I’m not.

“How detestable I am! I’ve a great mind to unresolve what I’ve resolved upon! Only

then it's absurd to go on making resolutions all for nothing—and after all I only did what every one else seems to do, and to expect as a matter of course. If I marry him, everybody will be envying my luck, and Alice will be in a seventh heaven of delight, and feel thoroughly repaid for all the trouble I've ever caused her in my life—even for eating that crab stuff the other day when I wouldn't. I daresay I should be very happy, too. I should be able to amuse myself tremendously, and should have a capital position, and whatever I want—more, too, for there'd be the husband whom I don't want into the bargain! How nice it would be to be able to make Alice happy in this way, and to get the position and wealth and general envy, and so on without having that unfortunate clog—a husband—tacked on to it all! 'But there's the hub, who in that

married state must surely come ;' and what a bore he'll be ! However, since the things that are so desirable can't be had without this clog, why, I suppose I shall have to say yes, if he chooses to ask me. But one thing I'm quite positive about, and that is that the wooing shall be done by him, and not me. To be willing to accept the superior advantages he can bestow is one thing, but it's quite another to pretend to think him heaps more charming than any one else, and to languish and make eyes at him as I've seen girls do sometimes. I've no idea of proclaiming to the whole world my readiness to fall into his arms the moment he pleases to open them ! Supposing he chose not to open them at all, what should I look like and feel like then ? Its vile and contemptible of me to have been able mentally to marry a man whom I'd never seen—it's

a blow to my self-respect to know that I've been capable of such a thing ; but to know that about myself is quite bad enough without letting other people discover it also—and I mean to take very good care that no one even suspects me of such a thing. What a nuisance it is that he's such a baby, and a man whom it would be so absolutely impossible to feel inclined to 'love, honour, and obey !' ”





CHAPTER IX.

CHLOE'S OBSERVATIONS ON THE BABY.

CHLOE'S natural quickness to take in all that went on around her, had already shown her the great interest taken by society in the movement of any unusually eligible young man. She well knew how eagerly it looks out for any indication of the quarter wherein he may seem inclined to bestow his inestimable affections; how ready it is to set afloat gossip, and to exaggerate the merest incipient flirtation into a definitely arranged marriage, so as, if possible, to frighten away the nascent

attachment, nip the affair in the bud, and keep the chance of securing the prize still open to the whole field. She knew what ill-natured eyes were sure to be watching her, and ever heard in imagination the tongue of society sneering at her for angling after young Lloyd. The consequence of this was to make her so extremely cautious in her behaviour towards him, and so much less at her ease with him than with other people, that every one of her friends, Alice, Edith, and Roger himself, believed her to be not only perfectly indifferent to him, but even to dislike him.

But however determined Chloe might be not to appear to take any interest in him, yet she could not help feeling in her secret heart some curiosity as to what sort of man this was to whom she believed that she might one day belong; and she would often watch him unobserved out of the corners of her eyes—

noticing to whom he was speaking, and listening to what he said, even when she seemed to be occupied with somebody else, and looking in another direction. By degrees she acquired an undefined sense of his being her property, which made her apt to feel irritated if he attended too much to any one else, though she would on no account let this irritation be seen, and would probably treat him with her usual coldness and constraint if he approached her.

“Did you notice how agreeable Roger Lloyd seemed to be making himself to Lady Elise last night at the opera?” asked Lady Gough one day. “He was in the Bolyn’s box almost all the evening.”

“Ah, was he really?” remarked Chloe lazily, with an air of not having given herself the trouble to observe the proceedings of such an uninteresting person at all.

"Yes, he was," pursued her sister, emphatically. "I wonder if she and her mother will manage to hook him. One can see with half an eye that they'll do it if they can."

"Daresay she'd suit the baby capitally," returned Chloe, with the utmost composure. "Somebody told me one day that she's a very good hand with children, and I think she's decidedly nice-looking."

Alice groaned in spirit over the impossibility of stimulating her sister to any jealousy in regard to Mr Lloyd, and said no more about the matter. But if she could have looked into Chloe's heart she would have seen that that young lady had been perfectly aware of his presence in Lady Bolyn's box, and had been by no means altogether pleased at the sight. Hadn't she made up her mind to put up with the man, and say yes if he asked her? and couldn't he tell that for him-

self without her having to show it? And if he was going to belong to her (or she to him) eventually, then what right had any other girl to go poaching in her preserves now? Weren't they her own property, even though she might not yet have chosen to occupy them?

Chloe's sentiments on the subject were clearly unreasonable, and of that she herself had some sort of inkling; but none the less there they were, and she felt aggrieved whether justly or not.

It has been mentioned that at their first meeting she had had a perception of his juvenility and strangeness to the ways of London, which had created in her mind a certain sense of comradeship on account of that much similarity in their circumstances. With this feeling, however, was blended one of contemptuous pity for a person who could

still seem so inexperienced, although several years her senior. He really might be expected to know better by that time, she thought scornfully. She felt perfectly certain that when she herself should be as old as he was, she would be quite superior to the remotest suspicion of babyishness ; and why couldn't he get over it as fast as she could ?

And yet now and then he would give some sign of strength and decision of character which would completely astonish her, and seem so inconsistent with the weak babyishness which she persisted in attributing to him, as almost to make her think she might have been mistaken.

One afternoon that he and Mr Scriven were both calling at the Goughs, Sir Cadwallader came into the drawing-room with the *Weekly Dirty Clothes Bag* in his hand. This newspaper had been held by Sir Cad-

wallader in high esteem ever since an article upon himself had appeared in it, wherein bitter satire had been disguised under terms of gross flattery. All his weak points had been extolled to the skies with covert irony; and as every man is more apt to think a compliment to himself true than untrue, and to pride himself most highly upon whatever are really his weakest points, therefore Sir Pomponious Ego had accepted all that the article said about him as literal praise, had been hugely pleased with it, and felt it incumbent on him to make some evident demonstration of his approval. To that end he had gone from shop to shop and spent at least ten shillings in buying copies of the paper, with a hazy sort of idea that thereby he was considerably promoting its circulation, and that so sharp a fellow as the editor would be certain to put down the unusual

run upon his paper to its true cause, viz., that it was the natural result of the laudatory article upon Sir Cadwallader Gough, M.P. for Cwm Eithin, an account of whom must infallibly confer importance upon the newspaper that published it. And since then he had always patronised it ostentatiously, and let slip no opportunity of giving it a good word—thereby very greatly rejoicing the hearts of his friends and acquaintances, who were quick to see the satire concealed under apparently fulsome compliments when another person was in question, even though they might perhaps have been less sharp in the case of praises lavished upon their own illustrious selves.

On the present occasion Sir Cadwallader was chuckling over an extremely spiteful paragraph in the *Dirty Clothes Bag's* last number which had just arrived.

“Here is the most deliciously cutting story,” said he, “about Lady Volauvent, as they call her—ha! ha! it’s Lady Flyaway, they mean, of course. It is most witty, and told in a—a—the most amusing style possible. I presume that when she has seen it she will hardly care a—a—to present her ‘well-marbled face,’ as the paper calls it, to society again, but will retire into seclusion. I wonder who found it out and sent it to the *Dirty Clothes Bag*. Have you any idea, Scriven?”

The ill-natured and libellous story had been routed out and retailed to the editor by none other than John Scriven himself. But it did not suit him to have his connection with the paper known, and he thought he might just as well put people on the wrong scent if possible.

“No, I can’t say that I know *for certain*,” answered he; “but I’ve been told on good

authority that Brown of the Polyhymnia often inspires or writes the society part of the *Dirty Clothes Bag*. He's supposed to be a very clever fellow, I believe. Haven't you heard the same of him, Lloyd?"

"Yes, people say he's clever," replied Roger drily.

"Do you know him well?" went on Mr Scriven; "if so, perhaps you can tell us if it's true that he contributes to the *Dirty Clothes Bag*?"

"No, I don't know him at all," answered Roger; "and if he does what you say, I don't want to know him either. In my opinion the writer of such stories is a cad, whoever he may be, and ought to be kicked out of the society of all gentlemen."

Had the world known of John Scriven that he had been called a cad, he would have felt bound to assume injured feelings, to make a

fuss about his honour, and to demand satisfaction ; but it made all the difference if no one else knew that he had been insulted, for his sensitiveness depended solely on what would be expected of him by other people. Honour was for him a mere piece of humbug, to be assumed in deference to public opinion, but not really existing at all ; and there was clearly no need to parade it in the present case, in response to a random shot that had been fired without any sinister intention. Therefore it was with unruffled composure that he heard himself called a cad who ought to be kicked out of the society of gentlemen, and never dreamt of resenting it.

But the baronet would not submit placidly to hear any one connected with the paper he loved condemned, without intimating his disapprobation.

“ You seem to be forgetting a—a—what

I may call the first principles of the British constitution, Lloyd," said he with dignity. "What would become of liberty of the press if a writer were treated as a—a—contumeliously as you propose? And let me tell you that whoever attacks the liberty of the press seeks to sap the a—a—foundations and basis of that liberty which is the glorious birthright of every Englishman, the a—a—traditional inheritance which must be handed down intact from generation to generation."

"Do you think liberty means the same thing as abolishing every kind of restraint?" asked Mr Lloyd. "It's seems to me there is a deal of difference between the two."

"Ah—h'mn—but you can't draw the line, my good fellow, you can't draw the line between them satisfactorily," returned Sir Pomponious. "No two people will a—a—be induced to agree as to what restraints to

retain and what to abolish, so there's no use in arguing about it. However, do just read this bit about milady Volauvent—you will find it most amusing."

"Thank you," answered Roger shortly, "but I've made it a rule never to read a word of the *Dirty Clothes Bag*."

"Never read the *Dirty Clothes Bag*!" exclaimed the baronet in astonishment. "What an extraordinary, a—a—I may say unheard of determination! May I presume to inquire the reason of it?"

"Well," replied Roger, "the fact is that I've seen in that paper ill-natured remarks about people lately dead which were sure to wound the feelings of the relatives; and I've seen statements in it which the editor knew quite well were lies—or would have found out to be so if he had made any inquiry at all about them; and that and other things of

the same kind which I call blackguardly and bad form have so set me against it that I never will buy the paper, or have it in my own house, or look at it."

Here was a young fellow actually speaking of the discriminating and well-conducted periodical which the baronet especially patronised as "blackguardly and bad form!" Sir Cadwallader was perfectly aghast at the idea, and was about to take up the cudgels on its behalf, when Mr Scriven—who had cast an eye meanwhile upon the subject of dispute, found something in it which effected a diversion.

"Did you see that there is an announcement of Lord Patrick Fitzshannon's engagement to Mrs Foldes?" asked he.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Alice.
"Well, of course every one could see that *he's* been meaning it for some time past;

but it wasn't so clear whether *she* was of the same mind or not. I wonder that she's taken him. Good-looking, and the son of a marquis—there's that much to be said in his favour, no doubt, but that's about all, I fancy. Very idle and selfish, I've heard, and with a turn for running wild and spending money though he hasn't got any—the last man to make a good husband, I should say. And she must be several years older than him, too; it's wonderful how she can be so silly!"

"Yes, I believe that's his character," remarked Mr Scriven, "only I fancy his laziness has kept him from running wild quite as much as he'd have done otherwise. He's so desperately indolent that he never does anything that gives him any trouble."

"Wasn't there some story about him and some girl in Dublin?" asked Lady Gough;

“either that he was engaged to her, or ran away with her, or was on the point of doing it, or something of the kind?”

“’Pon my word I rather think there was, now you mention it,” answered Mr Scriven. “However, he’s sure not be married already; he’s not the man to risk a prosecution for bigamy at any rate. He’s sure to be uncommonly pleased to get hold of such a rich wife—he’s always been looking after heiresses.”

And so the engagement was discussed and disparaged, and the engaged couple sneered at freely; and as soon as her visitors had departed, Lady Gough sat down to pen a note of effusive congratulations to Mrs Foldes on being engaged to so charming and unexceptionable a young man as Lord Patrick Fitzshannon — of whom she had just been speaking as a good-for-nothing, money-hunting rip. To see Alice’s note,

however, it might be thought that she regarded him as a very pearl and paragon of husbands, on the acquisition of whom Mrs Foldes might well rejoice, and for whom Alice herself entertained the most surprising esteem and liking. And all this conventional humbug she wrote without one qualm on the score of its entire falsehood.

Whilst she was thus occupied, Chloe was busy revolving in her mind what Mr Lloyd had said about the *Weekly Dirty Clothes Bag*, which had astonished her considerably. To hear it abused was nothing new—plenty of people would do that, and even go so far as to say that it really was quite too bad, you know, and quite ought to be put down. But never before had she heard of any one putting in practice what they professed to think about it, and actually refusing to buy, read, or in any way tolerate the newspaper

which they denounced. To speak of it as being too disgracefully scandalous, and an outrage upon all proper sense of decorum, was one thing, and not very uncommon ; but to give it up altogether was quite another matter. It was carrying principles to their logical consequences with a vengeance !

A paper that proclaimed and kept alive every gossiping, lying whisper from clubs and tea-tables, which would very likely have sunk into nothingness if it had not been given the tangible life of print, was universally acceptable. People felt they must go on reading it because, you see, it was so excessively amusing and clever ; and it really did contain so much news ; and then, too, it was so interesting to guess what names should fill in the blanks and asterisks judiciously interpolated in any history more libellous than common.

Really Mr Lloyd seemed very different from any one else in this matter; he had struck out a line of his own, and appeared possessed of a stiffer back bone than she had imagined. And if the baby could be so determined not to play with a coral and bells that he thought objectionable, might he not perhaps actually have a decided individuality of his own, and strength of mind to assert it in spite of all his seeming quietness?

And when she had reached this conclusion, Alice's note was finished, the carriage was at the door, and it was time to go out driving.





CHAPTER X.

WHY MRS FOLDES ACCEPTED.

THOUGH Mrs Foldes had liked Lord Patrick well enough to accept him, yet she was not in love with him, nor had she ever pretended to be so. Having no near relatives of any kind, she was getting rather tired of facing the world in absolute solitude, and desired to have some one with whom she should feel able to identify herself. And this desire disposed her to look favourably upon matrimony. She could of course easily have avoided a solitary life by engaging a lady companion, but to this she had

a rooted aversion ; for as she one day said to Chloe when speaking on the subject,—

“I know myself a great deal too well to have a companion, my dear. It would be a constant irritation to me to be with a person whose sole *raison d'être* in the house would be ME ; who would have nothing to do except to study me, to consider my whims and fancies, to make a fuss if my little finger ached, or an eyelash got turned into the corner of my eye ; in fact, to degenerate me into a twaddle as much as possible. She would be above associating with the servants, and would, therefore, depend wholly upon me for society. I feel convinced I should spend half my time in making her life miserable to her, because such is the badness of my disposition. But then as I'm not bad enough to go on doing wrong all day long with a clear conscience, I should spend the other

half in remorse for my ill-nature, accompanied by the certain knowledge that I should repeat it to-morrow! In six months of a companion I should inevitably become either a fearful bully and tyrant or else a twaddle."

As, also, a husband's interests would naturally be far more closely identified with her own than those of a paid companion could ever be, she had finally decided in favour of getting married.

After a good deal of hesitation she had come to the conclusion to accept Lord Patrick. He was undeniably good-looking, which is an attraction to which a few women are altogether insensible. He had rank also; and she did not object to the idea of having a handle to her name. He was too lazy to be very bad-tempered, so she had no fear of trouble on that score; and his laziness would make it all the easier for her to rule the roast

and have her own way, as she was fully resolved to do. Her eyes were quite open to the fact that he was poor and extravagant, and that her money constituted the charm that brought him sighing to her side ; but she had no intention of letting the purse-strings out of her own hands, and meant to be his master, and keep him in good order.

And so it had come about that she had at last agreed to marry him, telling him plainly at the same time that though she liked him well enough, yet that that was all, and that he must expect no romantic affection from her. As for him he was only too delighted to secure the golden prize on any terms, and was in a great fright lest even yet it might slip out of his grasp through any unskilfulness on his part.

It happened that they were alone together

in her drawing-room when Lady Gough's congratulatory effusion was delivered.

"What have you there, dearest?" asked he, as she read it; "anything amusing?"

"Not the least," she replied, tossing it carelessly over to him to read. "It's only a ditto ditto to all the other notes that come in shoals daily. Congratulations and good wishes, and how very fortunate I am in you and you are in me, and all that sort of thing, you know, which never really means anything. I must say, though, that there's a hearty, genuine warmth about the panegyrics lavished upon you and the way you are spoken of as though you really were almost the only one desirable husband in the world, that convinces me none of my correspondents can ever have coveted you in that capacity for herself, or any one belonging to her; there's a ring of sincerity about all the notes

that's quite conclusive on that point. So that I have the satisfaction of feeling that I am not interfering with any one else's hopes of happiness at all events."

Lord Patrick replied with a pretty little speech to the effect that he was and always had been profoundly indifferent to what any woman except herself might think about him, and that never before had he known what love meant. But, in reality, her observation had been a blow to his vanity which made him wince; for he had an extremely good opinion of his own powers of captivation, and by no means relished the unflattering supposition that nobody had wanted to have him. So whilst he made his little speech to his darling Constance, he was thinking regretfully of his pretty love in Dublin, and of how impossible it would have been to her to believe that he could ever be otherwise than

coveted and admired by the whole world. But then she had been in love with him, and Constance Foldes was not, which just made all the difference.

Soon after this the season came to an end, and society left London to disperse in all directions. And wherever it went throughout the land it did not fail to spread and inculcate Conventionality and Untruth—those two great offshoots from the common root of Humbug; and met everywhere with abundance of pupils who were ready and apt to learn whatever cult might be professed by those who had studied in the great school of London.





CHAPTER XI.

IF ONE GIRL WON'T, ANOTHER WILL.

GEDITH FARREN stayed on with the Goughs till the London season ended, and then returned to her own home at Hazel Hall ; while the Goughs and Chloe went off to Cowes and then Hom-burg to spend the next six weeks or so before going to their country house in Wales.

Roger Lloyd accompanied them to Cowes—still divided between his hankering after Chloe, and his fear of being induced to fall down and worship a divinity who would only spurn him scornfully in return. At Cowes

he was still more hunted and run after by chaperones than in London—for it could not be allowed that Alice should monopolise such a prize without a struggle to wrest it from her, and his intimacy at her house was regarded with the utmost jealousy in many quarters. This served to make Chloe more shy than ever in her manner to him. The more other people were after him the more careful she was so to behave as to show that whatever courting might eventually take place between them had originated entirely with him. On no account would she be seen to enter publicly into the lists and struggle for a man's love against all comers ; and she carried her morbid sensitiveness of being observed so far that she became perfectly icy to Mr Lloyd, who, by the time he left Cowes, had come reluctantly to the conclusion that she positively disliked him, and that it was

absolutely impossible for him to have a chance of ever winning her.

He was a good deal troubled about this ; for although he had not arrived at the point of being in love with her, yet he admired her more than any woman he had ever seen, and thought no one else had the power of being so agreeable, when she chose,—though it was, alas ! for the benefit of other people and not for him. The great object of his life was, as has been already said, to secure a wife as soon as possible. Then he would possess a proper and unalterable female head to his house ; for no man's mother, sister, or other female relation can ever fill that post so satisfactorily as a wife, on account of not having the same fixity of tenure, but being at any time liable to be displaced by the arrival of the legitimate holder of the office. Roger had a sense of incompleteness in life, of something

wanting to his home which could be removed only by the possession of a better half—and Chloe had appeared to him as exactly the girl to suit him in that capacity. But since she had unluckily taken such an aversion to him as she evidently had done, why, it only remained for him to put her altogether out of his head immediately, and be on his guard lest any memory of her should haunt and unsettle him, and hinder him from finding with some other girl the wedded felicity that he pined after. To be turned aside from this by the degrading folly of an altogether hopeless and unrequited passion he would have regarded as a very great misfortune. Fortunately he had only been pricked skin deep and not seriously wounded, and he thought that the best way of getting Chloe thoroughly out of his mind, and avoiding falling in love with her, would be to lose no time

about falling in love with some one else instead.

This, then, was the frame of mind in which he left Cowes. Nobody he had seen there took his fancy at all, and as he pondered over a cigar on the all-important and often considered topic of the future Mrs Lloyd, his thoughts suddenly reverted to Edith Farren. She was not a girl to be naturally very attractive to him, but he had got used to her, and grown to like her through constantly seeing her in Chloe's company. He had always found her kindly disposed and sympathetic; and often and often had she soothed and smoothed down his ruffled feelings when Chloe had mortified him by snubbing or neglect. What if she would be the girl to take that position in his home and heart which it would be obviously in vain to offer to her cousin? That cousin was, no

doubt, the one he would have if he could choose—but then she was unattainable, and must be banished from his mind.

After a good deal of consideration, he decided to go down to the neighbourhood of Edith's home, make acquaintance with her father and mother, and, as it were, reconnoitre her belongings before finally deciding whether or no he would lay himself out to fall in love with her. Accordingly he made a pretext of business to take him near Hazel Hall, and there easily got introduced to Mr and Mrs Farren, who invited him to stay with them instead of at the inn. Edith was as gentle and sympathetic as ever—there was nothing about her family contrary to what commended itself to his mind as befitting for his wife—and so he turned away resolutely (though not without an effort) from all thoughts of Chloe,

and determined to set about wooing Edith Farren.

As for her, she had never dreamt of achieving so brilliant a match as this, and could at first hardly believe it possible that so grand and much-sought-after a young man as Mr Lloyd should be in any way within her reach. She knew well that Alice had destined him for Chloe, and she had quite entered into Alice's views on the subject, and had thought him to be a most suitable husband for clever, pretty Chloe—in whose talents and good qualities of both mind and body Edith believed profoundly. But since Chloe would have nothing to say to him, Alice's hopes were evidently doomed to be disappointed; and under these circumstances Edith felt sure that no one could accuse her of treasonable conduct in accepting his offer—if ever he were to confer that great honour upon her.

Could it really be possible for such high promotion to fall to her lot? How delightful and overwhelming that would be! The mere idea made her shiver with nervous yet pleasurable excitement. Sometimes it would seem to her that she was simply absurd to be contemplating such a piece of luck as seriously likely to happen to her. Yet still—King Cophetua married the beggar maid; and was not she more than a beggar, and Roger Lloyd less than a king?

Gentle, good-natured, timid, shallow, and rather foolish, it did not take much to fluster her weak head. Her most strongly marked quality, and the one which had been the chief cause of Roger's being attracted to her, was a remarkable facility for sympathising with any person with whom she had to do. It cost her no effort—seeming to be as natural to her to absorb the ideas of her companion

of the moment as it is to a sponge to absorb water, and she had also the same sponge-like readiness for being wrung dry again and absorbing afresh from every fresh person who came near her.





CHAPTER XII.

THE FARREN FAMILY.

FROM Homburg the Goughs and Chloe proceeded to Hazel Hall, where they paid a couple of days' visit on their way back to Castell Eithin. Regularly, once a year, the Goughs and Farrens interchanged visits, as Sir Cadwallader considered it the proper thing to do in order to keep up the connection between the two families ; but, to tell the truth, these mutual visits were somewhat of a penance to both him and Mr Farren, who did not get on together by any means as well as their wives did.

There was hardly a single point on which the two gentleman agreed. And as each one made the height of his own self-esteem the standard whereby he measured the value of every differing opinion, and as that self-esteem was a very rocky mountain of size and immovability, it is evident that each of them looked down upon the other from an immensely superior altitude.

In politics they were opposed to one another, and both of them followed the fashion of most politicians of the day in being regular party men. That is to say, that having once decided to which side it would suit them to belong, they then felt all further trouble about forming opinions for themselves was taken off their shoulders, and that whatever might happen, they need express no opinion until instructed by the organs of their respective parties as to the

correct view to take. For what is the use of saying one day by the light of nature that a thing is good or bad, true or false, right or wrong, just or unjust, expedient or inexpedient, when on the very next day it may be necessary to say the exact reverse at the command of either the *Government Gull* or the *Opposition Owl*? And if, therefore, some war were unexpectedly discovered to be impending, or royal marriage proposed, or if some great disaster occurred—some invention were made—some fresh tax talked of—some strange theory broached—or, in short, whatever new topic of conversation might be started, nothing beyond a curt “Humph,” “indeed,” “so I hear,” or “ah, really,” could be extracted from either Sir Cadwalader or Mr Farren until they knew what the newspapers said about the matter. When once that was ascertained they would give

tongue fast enough about the point in question—declaring it to be either a national calamity or else a national blessing, either monstrously iniquitous, blundering, unjust, and awkward, or else a master-stroke of genius, diplomacy and good management, according to the line taken by their respective papers. They might be heard giving forth the substance of some leading article with as lofty an air of proprietorship as though it had been produced by their own brains; and generally succeeded, with the assistance of the party press, in getting up a fictitious excitement (which they thought would be expected of them) over whatever was the topic of the hour—however little they might really care about it.

Once only had they been known to forget their usual caution, and to indulge in a spontaneous expression of feeling; but they

had soon repented of their rashness, and been careful not to repeat it in the future. There had been a terrible explosion at a powder magazine, and when first the news was telegraphed, and the two gentlemen began to talk it over, they had for once agreed in their sentiments, speaking with natural pity of the victims of the accident, and thinking that it must have resulted from great carelessness on the part of either the work-people or else the officials. But their tone had changed a good deal, and was less harmonious when next they discussed the matter after the post had brought in the papers, and they had had time to imbibe wisdom from the *Government Gull* and the *Opposition Owl*. For then Mr Farren was ready to maintain that it was quite impossible for the workmen to have been in any way responsible for the accident; and that carelessness

was far to mild a word to apply to the Government authorities under whom such a catastrophe had been possible, who ought to be held guilty of manslaughter at the very least—even if not liable to the charge of wilful murder. Whilst Sir Cadwallader, on the other hand, was convinced that the extent of the accident had been greatly exaggerated, that the present authorities were in no wise to blame, and that it was to be ascribed partly to bad regulations which had been introduced into the establishment while the late Government had been in office, and partly to the inferior and dangerous nature of the powder then manufactured, some grains of which had probably been overlooked lying about in a corner, and caused the explosion. And the melancholy disaster which had plunged scores of poor families into mourning and destitution, soon came to

be regarded throughout the whole country as a mere party matter to be wrangled and fought over acrimoniously, and made into an excuse for either side to heap abuse upon their opponents—the *Opposition Owl* condemning and laying the whole blame upon the present Home Secretary, the manager of the magazine, and all their clerks, deputies, and subordinates, while the *Government Gull* retaliated by attacking the late officials in precisely the same way.

In the matter of horticulture Sir Cadwallader and Mr Farren agreed as little as in politics, though it was rather a favourite subject of the baronet's, and a regular hobby of Mr Farren's. Sir Cadwallader kept up splendid pineries, hot-houses, vineries, etc., because he thought it added to his state and dignity to have such evidences of wealth about him. He liked to play the part of

the generous patron of horticulture, and to take prizes at the local fruit and flower shows; and to talk grandly to his friends about "the advantage of exciting a spirit of competition, and setting an example to one's less wealthy neighbours you know, and of letting them see what results can be attained by proper care and management." (Though whether a poor clerk, or cottager, or farmer without glass or hot-houses at command was much benefited by beholding pine-apples and bunches of grapes grown at immense expense by Sir Cadwallader's Scotch gardener, seemed problematical to some few sceptical individuals.) But in spite of all this affected interest in matters botanical, he was in reality excessively ignorant about them, and Mr Farren looked down with great contempt upon his grand but unappreciative style of gardening.

Mr Farren himself gardened after quite a different fashion. Not rich enough to afford much gadding about, his garden was his great delight, and he divided his time equally between pottering about in it and reading French novels—the one occupation filled his outdoor, and the other his indoor existence. Fifty times a day he would fidget in and out the green-houses seeing after some pet plant, brushing off insects, opening or shutting windows, moving pots either into or out of draughts, regulating the temperature, or in some other way attending to the wants of his cherished plants as though they had been living animals. Indeed, he paid far more attention to them than ever he did to his fellow-creatures, for he was thoroughly selfish, and never thought of inconveniencing himself in the slightest degree on account of any one else.

By the time that the Goughs and Chloe arrived at Hazel Hall, Edith was in considerably better spirits than she had been when she went to pay her visit in Eaton Square ; but she had still by no means shaken off the depressing effect produced by the clairvoyante's prophecy, and continued to regard with terror and aversion the housemaid to whom she had taken a dislike, and who had from the first appeared to her to be the source whence danger was to be apprehended.

"*Have* you noticed our housemaid Anne?" said she to Chloe, "if not, *do* look particularly at her, and tell me if there isn't something extraordinary about the expression of her face—something to make your flesh creep!"

"'Twouldn't be a bad thing for some of it to creep right off my bones, I think, in this hot weather," answered Chloe, laughing.

“Never fear but what I’ll look at her the first time I have a chance, and if you see me suddenly begin to get thin you’ll know she’s taking effect! But I don’t want to hear about Anne now, I want to know what you’ve been doing since last I saw you, and whether you’ve been taking daily promenades up and down the leads on the roof of the house?”

“What in the world should I do that for?” asked Edith.

“Why, to remind yourself of London. The leads would feel like pavements to your feet, and as you’d be right amongst the chimneys you’d be able to inhale enough smoke and blacks to keep your lungs in practice for the charming London atmosphere. A real devotee of London would enjoy that sort of thing thoroughly.”

“Ah, *dear* London,” returned Edith, “how

I do love it! But I don't see why I should inflict the unpleasant part of a thing on myself to recall the pleasant—it would be like getting a thorn to prick myself with in order to remind me of a rose. No fear of my ever forgetting it without that! We've been going on here as quietly as usual, and nothing particular has happened—except, by-the-bye, that Mr Lloyd paid us a visit for a bit.”

“ Oh, so you've had the baby to mind, have you ?” said Chloe, with a faint tinge of sharpness in her tone. “ I didn't know your people knew him. When last I saw him he was just off to Mrs Foldes' wedding, and he didn't say a word about coming here.”

“ Very likely not,” answered Edith. “ I think his coming was just accidental. He happened to have some business that brought him here after the wedding, and then he hap-

pened to meet me one day out walking, and then papa asked him to come here instead of putting up at the inn, and then he stayed on a few days longer, and that was how it came about."

What made Chloe feel snappish and pettish all of a sudden? It was as if things in general were going wrong altogether; as if a host of minor afflictions had got themselves rolled into one, and were coming upon her simultaneously; as if she had become suddenly aware of a pricking pin, bad weather, boring companions, unbecoming clothes, an incipient influenza on the eve of a ball, a hungry flea making known his presence during a dinner-party, and similar small evils. The sensation was decidedly unpleasant, and naturally caused a good deal of nervous irritation. Of course Mr Lloyd's visit to Hazel Hall could not make any earthly difference

to her; but still she was sorry that the Farrens should be making a dead set at him to catch him for Edith, as they evidently were doing—it looked so bad. And then her sense of justice reminded her that her own belongings had been doing the very same thing on her account, and that she herself had acquiesced silently in their proceedings by consenting inwardly to marry the man, before ever she had seen him.

“We’re one as bad as another after all!” thought she, bitterly. “He’s fair game for any one to give chase to, and Edith has as much right to him as I or any other girl have. I’ve no special preference or affinity for him to give me any particular claim more than other competitors. Of course every one wants to get the spoils of so valuable an animal. Yes—the spoils; that’s all we care for about him! And since I’m perfectly

aware of that fact I don't mean to go trying to humbug myself about my object, and pretending its something different—love and affection and that sort of stuff. Pah! what an odious set we all are.”

The description of the Hazel Hall family would be incomplete without a word as to Mrs Farren. She was a timid, nervous woman, who, though not an invalid, was yet not in strong health, and who always seemed to be getting through existence as best she could, rather than definitely living. The daily ordering of dinners and seeing to household affairs was as heavy a burden as she could bear, and any greater mental exertion than that would probably have given her brain fever. Dimly aware that she was not much better than a nonentity, she would make occasional struggles to prove the reverse, and perhaps these struggles may have

contributed to the careworn, harassed, and generally anxious expression of her face. Though thoroughly well-intentioned and desirous to be in every respect just and truthful, she was far too deficient in back-bone ever to dream of setting up any opinion of her own against the unwritten code of conventionality, which was to her quite as binding as that of the Ten Commandments. It was impossible for her ever to think a thing wrong that was done or tolerated by a good many good sort of people ; therefore humbug must be right if society had no objection to it. She believed immensely in her niece Alice, whom she considered to be a model of tact, good sense, and judgment, and whose opinions she always received as little short of oracular utterances.

“ Really, Alice is quite wonderful ! ” said Mrs Farren to her husband the night after

the Goughs' arrival at Hazel Hall. "I don't believe there is a single thing that she doesn't understand when she likes to give her mind to it. And such admirable sense as she has, too!"

"So you've told me fifty times before," returned Mr Farren; "it's a pity she can't pass on some of it to her husband—I'm sure he wants it. A fine exhibition he made of himself this afternoon. I took him out to show him my new *Dendrobium* variety—it's the only one of the kind in England, and really well worth seeing. Well, when he got to the place where it stands amongst some other Epiphytes, he began pretending to admire it—protesting he had seldom seen one exactly similar, that it was a—a—highly interesting, and a—a—quite a curiosity, and a—a—altogether a specimen, upon the possession of which I had a—a—reason

to a—a—congratulate myself. It struck me by the way his head was turned, that he wasn't looking exactly towards the place where the *Dendrobium* stands, so I inveigled him into putting his hand upon the flower he was talking about—and what do you suppose he was lavishing his Brummagem praise upon? Nothing better than a common rubbishy *Orchis* that you may see everywhere! Yet there was the ignorant ass vowing he'd hardly ever seen such a thing before! And that's the man whose name appears on the committee of half-a-dozen horticultural societies, and who talks as if they couldn't possibly go right without him. It's really too absurd! Just fancy not knowing a *Dendrobium* from a common *Orchis*! Why, my butler Richards knows more about botany than Gough does!"

"Ah, by-the-bye, that reminds me," ex-

claimed Mrs Farren. "Won't it be well to begin soon about inquiring for another butler, since Richards will be leaving before long?"

"Leaving!" cried her husband in astonishment. "The deuce he will! All I can say is that I didn't know it."

"Why, he says you've promised him to have old Smith's farm at Grayford as soon as it's vacant; and that must be in a few more days, I'm sure, for old Smith is so bad to-day that the doctor says he can't possibly last much longer. So it seems time to begin looking out for some one to replace Richards when he goes. Dear me, what a bother that is! There is such a deal of worry always about changing servants—what with finding the new ones first and then having to put up with *their* ways till they get to learn *ours*. I often wish all

housework could be done by machinery, so that we needn't have any servants at all."

Mr Farren laughed.

"So that's all, is it?" said he. "'Pon my honour you gave me quite a turn. And do you mean to say you actually supposed that I should let a butler, who suits me so exactly as Richards does, leave me to take one of my own farms? *Pas si bête!* No doubt he's set his heart on it, and thinks he's going to get it—but he'll find himself somewhat out in his reckoning by-and-by. The history of the matter is that he's crazed to set up as a farmer, and says he's been only waiting to do so till he should find a farm precisely to his mind. Well, the other day there was a farm of the duke's to be let, which took his fancy a good deal, and he came and told me he was going to apply for it, unless I would be willing to let him

have Grayford whenever it fell in — as it appears that he likes Grayford better than any other farm he's seen anywhere ; and, of course, he knows it must be vacant before long, with the present tenant so ill as he is. It wasn't to be supposed I should be such a fool as to let a good butler slip so easily, so I told him he should have what he wanted, just to keep him quiet, and stop him from applying for the duke's farm ; and it's all safe now, for some one else has taken it, and the chance is gone. He's not a man who is easy to please about things, or who'll be likely to take anything that isn't exactly to his fancy, so I daresay he won't find another farm to suit him in a hurry. Of course I shall just get out of letting him have Grayford somehow or other when the time comes. I never had a butler to suit me so well before, and I certainly don't

mean to let him leave me if I can help it."

"Ah ! now I understand about it," answered Mrs Farren ; "I was quite puzzled before to account for what he said. I'm afraid he'll be terribly disappointed though. He's such a gloomy, odd sort of man (though he's such a capital servant), that I'm almost frightened of him sometimes when he gets out of temper. He seems to take things to heart so much."

"Oh, he'll be disappointed just at first, I daresay," answered Mr Farren carelessly ; "but he'll get over it all right enough when he finds grumbling don't help him. He must learn that people can't always have things exactly to please themselves. I really flatter myself I got out of the difficulty very cleverly so as to avoid parting with him. There's nothing like a little judicious man-

agement to keep things smooth in this world."

And then, reflecting complacently on his skill in managing—(selfish lying some people might have termed it)—he got into bed and composed himself to sleep.





CHAPTER XIII.

HUMBUGS AT CASTELL EITHIN.

NOT far from the town of Cwm Eithin, for which Sir Cadwallader was member, stood his country house, Castell Eithin. It was his firm conviction that throughout the whole of that district he enjoyed unbounded respect and popularity amongst high and low, rich and poor, and was as it were surrounded with a halo of affectionate awe and admiration. He had laid himself out for that sort of thing, and believed it impossible that he could have failed to attain it.

Was he not a person of birth, much consideration, standing, and influence—one of the richest men in the place—a member of Parliament, and consequently a professed statesman? Did he not run up bills freely in Cwm Eithin shops, and pay them without questioning the items? Did not his name occupy a prominent place in all lists of subscribers to local charities? Did he not give away piles of blankets, beef, and coals at Christmas to church and chapel alike? Did he not throw open his house and grounds from time to time, and entertain all his constituents with urbane and condescending hospitality? Did he not even occasionally enter the dwellings of farmers, labourers, tenants, and such like inferior beings? Did he not, when brought in contact with people of that class, assume a bluff, hail-fellow-well-met, sham-hearty sort of manner, and shake

hands with and speak affably to them? And even if his conversation on these occasions were always limited to a few stereotyped questions about health, garden, and family, the answers to which were invariably forgotten by the time he met the same individuals again, yet it never entered his head to suppose that this evidence of carelessness could affect his popularity at all. For if a gentleman and great man like him vouchsafed to recognise the lower orders as a class that was surely all that could be expected of him, and it would be absurd to suppose that he need give himself the trouble of individualising them—of distinguishing Tom from Jack, and remembering whether it were Bill or Jim who had suffered some domestic misfortune.

In his secret heart he loved all kinds of public dinners, bazaars, cricket matches, flower shows, agricultural meetings, and similar rural

festivities, because of the scope they afforded for airing his eloquence and displaying his grandeur. But he thought it unbecoming to his dignity to show this satisfaction, and therefore took pains to have it supposed that he regarded going to these places as a terrible bore, and only went out of good nature and from a sense of duty.

“A—a—the invitation I received was so remarkably pressing that I felt it would be too a—a—disobliging and unkind if I were to refuse. They laid so much a—a—stress upon having me, and attached such great importance to it, that I was a—a—quite unable to decline,” he would say, and fully believed the matter to be just as he had stated it. For he was far too certain of the inestimable benefit conferred by his presence and patronage to imagine that any one else would fail to be of the same opinion. Con-

sequently the conventional terms of formal circulars asking him to support and attend various societies and meetings always seemed to him to be expressions of genuine anxiety for his presence, which were no more than natural, and which it behoved him to gratify. And when he received a request for the distinguished honour or favour of his attendance anywhere, he always took the words in their literal sense, and believed that to withhold that favour and honour would inflict much loss, injury, and disappointment upon whoever had sent the request. In London it was no doubt possible that there might be greater personages than himself; but not in his own borough of Cwm Eithin. There, at all events, he felt confident of reigning supreme, and having an inalienable right to play first fiddle on all occasions.

To Castell Eithin the Goughs returned, after a few days' visit at Hazel Hall, and their return home was quickly followed by calls from all their acquaintances in the neighbourhood. Amongst the first of these visitors came the Osnaburgh Joneses, in a resplendent yellow barouche, with servants in orange liveries and bright chesnut-coloured horses. Chloe was descending the stairs just as the golden vehicle rounded the sweep of the drive to the front door and came in sight of the staircase window, and she ran quickly to her sister, to announce the approaching and unwelcome invasion.

"Oh, bother!" exclaimed Lady Gough. "Fly, Chloe, and try and catch the footman in time to tell him to say not at home to them! Such bores as those really ought not to be allowed to go calling so early in the afternoon, before one's had time to get out of the way."

Chloe rushed off on her errand with the utmost good-will, but returned the next moment with the corners of her mouth drawn down into a comical expression of disgust.

"Too late," she said, shaking her head, "he'd got to the door first. The Philistines be upon thee—and here they come."

Alice cordially reciprocated Chloe's *moue* of disgust, and next minute was engaged in welcoming the visitors with as much hearty warmth as though they had been some of her best beloved friends. For Mr Osnaburgh Jones was one of her husband's most influential constituents, and it was politic to be on such terms with him and his family, as to secure his support in the event of any rival candidate coming forward to oppose Sir Cadwallader, as member for Cwm Eithin.

"What a lot of self-command she has, and what a power of calling it up at a moment's

notice!" thought Chloe admiringly, as she contrasted the apparently enthusiastic welcome now being accorded to the Osnaburgh Joneses, with her sister's readiness of a minute ago to escape from them by any possible lie or *ruse*. "I almost wonder whether Alice ever does really care for one person more than another—I'm sure I don't know how she's to show it if so!"

"So *glad* not to have missed you, dear Mrs Jones," smiled Alice; "I should have been *too* disappointed if I'd been out when you called. It's really *good* of you to have come early, as that's the only time to find any one at home at this time of year. And actually Mr Jones has come too! Now I take that as quite a special compliment—knowing, as I do, how averse to morning calls the mind of a Benedict generally is."

Mr Jones bowed politely.

"The chance of the pleasure of seeing Lady Gough is enough to explain any departure from ordinary rules," replied he. "On the present occasion, too, I particularly want to speak to your good husband, and am glad to hear that he is at home."

"Oh, yes," said Alice, "he's in, and he's sure to make his appearance directly he knows you are here. He and I do so enjoy a nice comfortable chat with old friends like you! And when did you come back from London, dear Mrs Jones?"

"Not till quite the end of the season, Lady Gough," answered Mrs Jones—a lady whose leading characteristics were the being always redolent of inferior scent, an intense ambition to be thought fashionable, a trick of constantly repeating the name of the person to whom she was speaking, if it was any one to whom she wished to make herself agree-

able, and an occasional mismanagement of the letter *h*—of which crime she was usually conscious as soon as committed, and would take refuge in a little fit of coughing in order to conceal it. “We were in no hurry to leave that fascinating town and all the superior society one gets there, Lady Gough. The loss of that society is such a drawback to the country, in my opinion. But of course your return here makes an immense difference, Lady Gough—I cannot tell how much we rejoice in having some of our London set within reach again.”

Here the consciousness of having introduced a superfluous consonant discomposed her and made her stop abruptly with an affected cough, which was, however, hardly needed, as Alice continued the conversation so readily as to smooth over the blunder and make it hardly perceptible.

“Ah, yes,” said Alice gravely, without giving a sign of the merriment secretly excited in her breast at the absurdity of the idea that the Goughs and the Osnaburgh Joneses belonged to the same London set—whereat she promised herself a good laugh by-and-by when the visitors should have departed; “London is very fascinating, no doubt. But still we find an *immense* charm about dear old Cwm Eithin, and always look forward with the *utmost* pleasure to our stay down here amongst our many old friends—yourselves and others. I think that country neighbours have a sort of peculiar, homelike, friendly feeling for one another, almost as if they were of the same family, which is very delightful to my mind, and which does not exist in London. I know Cadwallader and I miss it there terribly. Don’t you find the same thing?”

For whenever Alice was in the society of her husband's constituents she was always sure to be quite enthusiastic in regard to Cwm Eithin and its belongings, and to appear to consider that borough as one of the most desirable and highly favoured spots on the face of the earth.

"I have noticed the difference you mention, Lady Gough," replied Mrs Jones, who saw here an opportunity not to be lost of representing her London life as a constant whirl of fashionable gaiety. "But really it is not to be wondered at when one thinks of how much there is to do in town, and how very little time one has to oneself, Lady Gough. What with the park, and dinners, and balls, and parties, and visiting, and shopping, I find I get so hurried and drove day after day, and night after night, that I've hardly a minute to see any one—not what I may call

properly, Lady Gough. And even when one's at the same party as one's friends, it's quite likely one may miss meeting them through not both going at the same time. Why, take you and me, Lady Gough, we didn't hardly ever meet except in the Row sometimes—Ah! I think there was somewhere else I remember meeting you at too, Lady Gough—dear me! now where ever was it? Wasn't it at one of Lady Cosmopole's parties?"

This forgetfulness was merely a little bit of humbug, designed to produce the impression that she had attended so large a number of fashionable assemblies similar to that at the Foreign Office, as to make it difficult to her to distinguish between them, or to recollect accurately at which one she might have met any particular person. But the real truth was, that the appearance of the Osnaburgh Joneses at Lady Cosmopole's had

been a unique event in their lives; and though, when there, they had known not a soul except the Goughs, yet it had been such a source of endless glorification and pride to Mrs Jones, that every detail and incident of the party was imprinted on her memory too deeply to be ever forgotten.

Alice, who knew well the exact social standing of the Joneses, was in no wise taken in by the affected forgetfulness, and was much diverted at it. For her own part, however, she was at that moment only eager to turn the conversation so as to get away as soon as possible from the subject of the rarity of their meetings in London, because she had a guilty consciousness of having rather avoided than sought out the Jones family, and of having neither accepted their invitations, nor yet asked them to her house, as might have been expected from the warm

friendship which she professed to entertain for them.

“Yes—I remember quite *well* meeting you at the Foreign Office,” answered she. “What *charming* parties those always are! And that reminds me of something I was saying the other day, that I should like to know your opinion on. I said I thought them quite the pleasantest of the political drums—what with the delicious music and flowers, and having room enough to move and air to breathe, and being sure of meeting such hosts of friends, and all the last new lions. Now don’t you agree with me?”

It would have been hardly possible to flatter Mrs Jones in a more acceptable manner, than by asking for her opinion on such a subject. Hitherto she had in her inmost heart regarded Lady Cosmopole’s party as a thing too sublime to be within

the range of criticism, even from the Queen herself; yet here was she being asked what she thought of it as though it were a matter of course for her experience of similar grandeurs to enable her to compare it with others, and as though she were considered to be a thoroughly competent judge of the matter! Such judicious tickling of her palate made her feel already perched on a pinnacle of that great mountain of fashion which she was longing to scale.

“Oh, certainly, Lady Gough,” returned she, actually flushing with the satisfaction and sudden access of dignity which she felt; ‘I entirely agree with you, Lady Gough. They really could not possibly be better done than they are.’”

“There, Chloe,” observed Alice, turning to her sister with the air of a person bringing important and valuable evidence to bear upon

some vexed question ; “you hear what Mrs Jones thinks about the F. O. drums. You see she *quite* takes my view of them, instead of preferring the Piccadilly House ones as Lady Jane does.”

The entrance of Sir Cadwallader here changed the conversation ; but Mrs Jones’ state of intense bliss remained unaltered. From time to time her countenance was illumined by a happy smile as she again and again reminded herself that she had not only achieved, for once at least in her life, an admittance amongst some of the very *crème de la crème* of society at the Foreign Office, but had furthermore been supposed competent to criticise and pass judgment upon that august assembly !

It was as though a mole had been asked his opinion as to the relative brightness of the sun and the electric light—which would

probably be the most delicate compliment that it would be possible to pay him. For the more acutely conscious a humbug is of his own deficiencies, the more gratifying it is to him to fancy them unnoticed by the rest of the world. And if exception be taken to a simile which classes the mole amongst humbugs, as being unfair to the mole, the reply is this,—what greater humbug can exist than a creature who pretends to be too bashful and retiring to show himself in public above ground, and who yet never fails to make his presence and actions more obtrusively conspicuous than those of any other animal?

“I was anxious to have a word with you,” said Mr Jones to Sir Cadwallader, “about the poaching that’s been going on lately in this part of the world. It seems to be

assuming quite serious dimensions. Don't you think it would be advisable for the gentry of the neighbourhood to hold a meeting to discuss what can be done to put it down?"

"My return home," replied the baronet majestically, "has been so recent that as yet I have only heard a—a—rumours and not facts in regard to the subject to which you allude, and I must confess that I do not a—a—altogether participate in the uneasiness you manifest. I have little doubt that matters have been a—a—considerably exaggerated. It seems impossible that there should be cause for serious apprehension amongst so well affected a population as ours, and a—a—especially where there is a sufficient staff of keepers and watchers—as is the case throughout this district."

"So one would think," answered Mr Jones deferentially. "But yet the poaching

is carried on in an unusually daring manner, and on such a large scale, that the keepers seem to be quite intimidated. It is said that most of the poor people about have more or less a hand in it, and that a sort of poaching epidemic seems to have set in amongst them."

The baronet smiled with an air of ineffable superiority.

"I can hardly imagine such a thing likely," said he. "Such a state of affairs a—a—could surely only exist in a neighbourhood where the large proprietors might have brought upon themselves a—a—unpopularity by stinginess and exclusiveness, and unwillingness to go amongst the poor or interest themselves in any way out of their own class. And I think I may say that is not the case to any great extent here. I feel a—a—confident that the lower orders will support no attack upon the property of any

gentleman who has a—a—conciliated them, and a—a—shown himself liberally disposed towards them, and a—a—ready to forward efforts for their improvement and elevation. I, for one, think I may flatter myself that what humble endeavours I have myself made in that direction have been a—a—appreciated by those whom I have striven to assist, and that my poorer neighbours entertain for me an amount of a—a—respectful affection, which will prevent their taking part in or permitting any depredation on my preserves. There is a Bulwark behind which I shall a—a—confidently rely on sheltering myself, and that Bulwark consists of the good feeling subsisting between them and me, a—a—super-added to their instinctive loyalty to the a—a—authority of one so much above them in position, and recognition of what is due to his natural superiority.”

Sir Cadwallader felt that such a speech as that was really too good to be wasted in common everyday life upon an audience of only five persons; but it consoled him to reflect that he was sure to have plenty more occasions of discussing the poaching with other people before long, so that there was every prospect of being able to exhibit the bulwark phrase in public to a satisfactory extent.

“Oh, quite so, Sir Cadwallader, quite so!” replied Mr Jones, who was decidedly impressed by the baronet’s display of oratorical power, but who knew a good deal more than that gentleman did as to how far the poaching had already gone. “A gentleman like yourself *ought* certainly to suffer no kind of annoyance from the lower orders; but then unfortunately there are so many evil-disposed persons in the world, that one can’t always

trust safely to the good feeling which should prevail. I was told just now that on the river near Troedyrallt last night there were thirty or forty men, with their faces blackened, spearing salmon by torchlight quite openly. No one attempted to interfere with them, and most of the inhabitants of the place quietly watched what was going on from the bridge."

"A—a—I had not yet been communicated with to that effect," returned Sir Cadwallader, "but no doubt shall shortly receive a—a—full information as to what has been done. I anticipate that a—a—thorough examination and inquiry will prove the report you have heard to be a—a—greatly exaggerated, even if not perhaps wholly false."

"I fancy your part of the river lies rather near Troedyrallt, doesn't it?" asked Mr Jones.

"It does," returned Sir Cadwallader, "and as I have some tenants out there I feel sure that they, at least, would not have calmly a—a—encouraged such proceedings as you describe. Their sentiments of a—a—personal attachment and awe would have restrained them from either themselves infringing the rights of that class to which I belong, or countenancing such infringement on the part of others. Still, I think it may be advisable for me to a—a—take the first opportunity that may offer to a—a—publicly declare my extreme reprehension and a—a—disapproval of any kind of a—a—encouragement or toleration extended to any poacher whatever."

"I only hope you will, Sir Cadwallader," exclaimed Mr Jones; "there's something quite horrid and shivery, Sir Cadwallader, in thinking of men in disguise going about at

night with torches and breaking the laws as they please, Sir Cadwallader, like so many savage red Hindians—ahem, ahem, I've swallowed a fly somehow!—and no one lifting a finger to stop them. How do we know it wouldn't be just the same, Sir Cadwallader, if it was burglaries and murders they were after? We were expecting Lady Lollop to pay us a visit shortly, Sir Cadwallader; but don't you think I really ought to put her off, Sir Cadwallader, with things going on like this 'ere—ahem, ahem, how troublesome a fly is in one's throat to be sure!"

"Reassure yourself, madam," said the baronet with dignity. "I believe I may a—a—take upon myself to say that you have no cause for apprehension. Some few strangers amongst us may indeed be a—a—creating a certain amount of disturbance, but that is all; in my opinion—a—a—the evil cannot have

spread further. Remember, too, that in the a—a—event of serious mischief arising at any time, we of the a—a—upper classes should at once a—a—put forth our iron strength in earnest, and immediately crush out every spark of disorder as easily as a—a—Nasmyth hammer annihilates an empty eggshell!” That’s nearly as fine as the Bulwark, thought he; and after pausing for an instant in almost wondering admiration at his own prodigal display of eloquence, he resumed, “I am most truly glad to have returned home at this particular moment; as if any crisis should occur, my presence, and a—a—personal exercise of whatever, a—a—feeble influence I may chance to possess, might, not impossibly, be of some a—a—benefit and assistance. I hope, a—a—I trust, a—a—I am almost positive that my own people will be prepared to rise like one man at my voice,

and a—a—rally round me in support of law and order.”

“And what immediate steps do you think should be taken?” inquired Mr Jones.

“I am not prepared,” answered Sir Cadwallader, “to reply to that question until I shall have had time, and a—a—opportunity for hearing more about the matter than a—a—I have yet been able to do. I shall determine upon nothing hastily, and a—a—without mature deliberation. I have received a most urgent, and a—a—flattering entreaty to dine with the Pigjobber’s Mutual Improvement Society next Thursday, and to a—a—address a few words to them on that occasion. And I may possibly think fitting to take that opportunity of a—a—making known emphatically my absolute, and a—a—uncompromising condemnation of every form of lawlessness. That condemnation will a—a—bear weight

with the lower classes, I think ; and I might perhaps also a—a—indicate to them with advantage, what course I should wish them to adopt when a—a—accidentally becoming cognisant of breaches of the law on the part of others.”

The recollection of this dinner came like soothing balm to his soul ; for he reflected what a splendid opportunity he would then have to air the sentences about the Bulwark and Nasmyth hammer in public, and thus make up for having wasted such pearls of rhetoric before an inadequate audience like the present.

The Osnaburgh Joneses now prepared to depart ; this was of course urgently deprecated by the hostess, who pressed them not to go so soon, but to stay and have tea, as warmly as though her afternoon’s happiness depended on keeping them with her. Chloe, who was

heartily sick of doing heavy duty with Miss Gloriana Jones (the daughter), listened in fear and trembling lest her sister should be taken at her word, and was greatly relieved to hear that the visitors had an engagement which necessitated their taking immediate leave.

“Thank goodness they’re gone at last!” exclaimed Alice, as the door closed upon the departing Joneses. “I began to think they never would go at all—what intense bores they are! Come out, Chloe, and let’s get some fresh air to blow us clean from those vile, stale, musky scents that Mrs Jones always poisons one with. They hang about wherever she’s passed, so that I’m sure one can track her for hours after she’s been in a house—quite like hounds running a drag! Was there ever a better joke than to hear her talk about London, and society and Lady Cosmopole’s

just as if she knew anything whatever about the matter? Why can't outsiders learn what fools they make of themselves when they try to palm themselves off as anything else?"

So much for the importance to be attached to a cordial reception from one of the humbugs!

END OF VOL. I.



